

National Recreation and Park Association

PARK ADVOCATE HANDBOOK



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and Park Association

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The Park Advocate Handbook is a joint project of the National Recreation and Park Association and Partnerships for Parks, a cooperative program of the City Parks Foundation and the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.

MORE ABOUT NRPA AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR PARKS

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national, not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of more than 21,000 recreation and park professionals and citizens, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy lifestyles, recreation initiatives, and conservation of natural and cultural resources.

Partnerships for Parks is a nationally-recognized program that helps New Yorkers work together to make their parks thrive. Recipient of the Innovations in American Government award, Partnerships strengthens a diverse, growing network of dedicated park volunteers and groups by creating opportunities for them to celebrate their parks and accomplishments, access resources, become more effective leaders in their communities, and work with government to affect decisions about their parks.

For more information on NRPA's in depth training and support, contact customer service at cservice@nrpa.org.

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Introduction

The power local citizens can have in shaping livable communities through engagement and investment in local parks is often understated. One important model in developing community ownership over our public spaces is through the creation of a park “friends group.”

“Friends groups” are generally formed by a group of citizens with common interests in the stewardship of a local park. Their activities can range from fundraising and volunteer work to significant operational support. At times, friends groups form on a temporary basis to support development or conservation of a specific park.

This handbook will have you well on your way to engaging with your community through the creation of a network of support for local parks.

Each section covers an important aspect of creating, managing, and promoting the activities of your group.

Part I: Planning and Organization offers suggested first steps when forming a park support group including, structure and by-laws, becoming a tax exempt not-for-profit, and fundraising. Information is designed to help you evaluate what kind of support group you want to be and make getting started easier.

Part II: How to Develop Leaders and Build Allies focuses on developing leadership skills within your group and how to go about building important relationships. The success of your group largely depends on how well your group works as a team and is able to build support for your issues.

Part III: Developing Effective Communication and Outreach offers suggested mechanisms to build awareness of your issues and the credibility of your organization. Becoming aware of the variety of communication tools available and how to get the most impact out of them will have you well on your way to engaging the public.

Part IV: Event Planning Toolbox gives you the tools you need to create successful events in your park. When people have a good time in the park because you’ve drawn them in with a good event, they’ll feel better about the park and be more likely to respect it and support it in the future.

Part V: How to Make Your Park Safer offers suggested tips on how to mobilize your community if safety concerns are an issue in your park. The little things that make a park seem uncared for and dangerous—graffiti, trash, broken glass, people drinking, misbehaving or playing very loud music—can be turned around with a strong park support group.

Part I: Planning and Organization

A. ESTABLISHING A PARK FRIENDS GROUP

Getting Started

1. Invite Others to Join the Cause

- **Create a Core Group.** In the early stages, most of the work of establishing a park “friends group” is done by a handful of dedicated people. This group should reflect the diversity of the community, meet often to do the real organizing, then report on their progress and get feedback from stakeholders.
- **Hold a General Interest Meeting.** In order to find people who care about the park, schedule a meeting in a public place, invite everyone you know, post flyers all over your neighborhood, including neighborhood newsletters. Use the meeting as an open forum to discuss the park and what people want done there.
- **Keep on Recruiting.** Take every opportunity to bring more people into both the general and the core group. There’s power in numbers.

2. Set Your Goals

- **Decide as a Group.** Decide together what “helping the park” means. If you set the goals alone, you might leave something out important to someone else.
- **Be Realistic.** You can’t completely renovate your playground next week, but you can host a workday. Start small and build, otherwise you’ll get frustrated and burn out.
- **Be Specific.** If you clearly define your mission it will be easier to convince others to help you because they’ll know exactly what you’re about.

3. Introduce Yourself

- **Contact Important People.** Make sure to let everyone know about your group—local elected officials, the deli across the street, and others. Before people can help you, they have to know who you are.

- **Meet the Parks Department.** From the very beginning, you should be in close contact with your Parks and Recreation Department contact, such as the manager responsible for the park, program, or facility.
- **Host a Visible Event.** Holding a visible event gives you legitimacy. Host an event in the park (family picnic, workday) and advertise everywhere. Make sure to have a table at the event for recruiting new members and talking about the group.
- **Network.** Everybody knows somebody who can help, whether it’s a lawyer who can help you fill out IRS forms, an artist who designs posters, or an old friend of a local elected official. Different people have different skills and connections, and you need them all.

General Principles

1. Don’t Do It Alone

Involve as many people in your group as possible. In so doing, you will:

- **Prevent Burn Out.** The old saying holds true; many hands make light work.
- **Achieve Critical Mass.** If you’re taking back your park from negative elements, you have to change its “feel.” You can do that by bringing a lot of people into the park.
- **Have Political Clout.** The more people you have, the more attention you’ll get from everyone—other groups in the neighborhood, government agencies, and elected officials.

2. Do Something Do-Able

Begin with a highly visible, quickly achievable project like painting benches or organizing a small fair. It’s best to start this way so that you can:

- **Establish Your Credibility.** Word gets out that you don’t just talk, you do something.
- **Inspire Your Volunteers.** A successful project makes volunteers feel good about their efforts because they see real progress in a short time.

3. Do It and Do It and Do It

The biggest mistake groups make is organizing one big event and then waiting until next year to do it again. Running regular projects will:

- **Add Up.** Your park, program, or facility won't be changed by a single project. Real change occurs only when people see things happening over and over again.
- **Prove that You Mean Business.** Consistent action shows people that you're not going away.

core group meetings so they can meet all of you. You should also introduce yourself at meetings of your Neighborhood Association, other civic groups, or at the Parks & Recreation Board for your facility if applicable.

3. Look Professional

When you're asking for a meeting, don't approach someone as Joe Smith, private citizen. Approach them as Joe Smith, representative of Friends of _____ Park. If you send someone a letter, do it on your group's letterhead (if you don't have any, design some). And always send a thank you note after someone has met with you. If after meeting with someone you have agreed to take some kind of action, follow through and—just as importantly—make sure they know you did.

4. Give Something Back

People will be more likely to help you if you help them. In order to earn the goodwill of a local elected official, let him or her make a speech at one of your meetings or events. To thank merchants for donations, acknowledge them on a flyer. If your park supervisor has been especially helpful, send a letter to the Parks and Recreation Director pointing that out. For more information on building relationships, see Part II, How to Develop Leaders and Build Allies.

How the National Recreation and Park Association Can Help

In addition to the NRPA Park Advocate Handbook, we have several FREE online trainings that can help you form your group. Check out “Developing Friends Groups: A Guide for Citizens” at www.pyxislearningcenter.org.

Building Relationships

Never do anything from scratch that you don't have to! Chances are you already know people who can help you, so go to them first. Remember that everyone in your group has connections, and their connections have connections—networking is the key. But when you have to do something from scratch:

1. Identify the Key Players

There are some people that you need to know, whether you have a connection to them or not. These include: your park supervisor, your park manager, local elected officials, your neighborhood police officers, a local newspaper reporter, local merchants, and leaders of other civic groups.

2. Introduce Yourself

You can start with the phone, but with the exception of a reporter, it's best to set up one-on-one introductory meetings with the key players. At these meetings you should tell them about your group and its purpose and discuss ways you can help each other help the park. Don't make any demands yet, and don't be accusatory or confrontational. These are just friendly, low-key, get-to-know-you meetings. Alternately, after an introductory phone call, if you think it's appropriate, you can invite any of the key players to one of your

B. FORMALIZING THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR GROUP

Mission, Goals and Objectives

When starting a parks group, it is important to have a clear sense of both your overarching mission and your goals for both your park and for your group. Keep the following points in mind while your group is thinking about its mission.

What Is a Mission?

A group's overarching mission reflects a set of core beliefs and assumptions that define the need for the organization and the results it expects to achieve. A mission:

- reflects a purpose and vision;
- articulates a group's basic beliefs and assumptions;
- is often implied rather than explicitly stated;
- reflects how the organization intends to contribute to the community/larger society; and

- answers the questions: What are we trying to accomplish? How will we do it? Where? For whom? Why?

Very often parks groups incorporate one or more of these three things into their mission:

- **Physically Improving the Park:** from cleaning and planting to major renovations
- **Programming the Park:** hosting regular and special events, from concerts to a day camp
- **Increasing/Improving Park Usership:** Bringing children into a playground, or school groups into a natural area, or dog lovers into a dog run.

You should take the time to develop a **mission statement**. It will help your group articulate its purpose and focus its ideas. Idealist.org references an article by Ron Meshanko¹, a leader in the non-profit sector, who says, a group's mission statement "should be a one-sentence, clear, concise statement that says who the [group] is, what it does, for whom and where. Period!"

Example: "The friends of Lovely Park is a 501(c)(3) community-based organization providing social, educational, and multicultural after-school programming for high school students in Lovely Park, and the surrounding community of Jamaica, NY."

What Is a Goal?

A goal is the purpose toward which an endeavor (your project) is directed. It focuses your group's work to reflect the larger overarching mission. A good goal is:

- **Visionary**—it should offer an image of the state you are trying to achieve.
- **General**—it should be defined broadly enough to encompass all the activities you will do in trying to achieve it.
- **Brief**—simple, succinct, and easy to remember and understand.
- **Measurable**—so that you will be able to know if you have achieved it!

Example: To create and support a sustainable coalition of partners for Lovely Park that will raise money, hold events, and act as advocates for the park with minimal support from government agencies.

¹ Idealist: <http://www.idealists.org/ifa/en/faq/66-22/16-27>

Setting Your Goals

Achieving a lofty mission requires taking small, tangible steps. These steps are your group's goals. Your short-term goals should be simple and easily achievable; your long-term goals can be more complicated. For example, a first step to taking your park back from crime could be painting over graffiti and meeting your police officers. A longer-term goal might be to establish a citizens' patrol.

The table below illustrates a list of actions commonly taken by parks groups. It should give you an idea of what is achievable right now, and what is achievable in the future. Of course, every situation is unique, and you should take this guide as an approximation only.

Notice that the list is divided into two sections: (1) goals for your park and (2) goals for your group. Remember that you are not just helping your park; you are growing a community group. As your group gains experience and sophistication, your effectiveness in the park will grow too.

What Is an Objective?

Objectives measure particular outcomes or accomplishments of a project. Ideally the accomplishment of each objective brings you one step closer to the achievement of the project's goal. A good objective is:

- **Impact-oriented**—do not describe a process, but represent desired changes in particular factors.
- **Measurable**—specific in terms of numbers.
- **Time-limited**—achievable within a specific period of time.
- **Specific**—clearly defined and easy to understand.
- **Practical**—achievable and appropriate within the context of the project.

Example: Convene monthly meetings of representatives from at least five of the community groups working in Lovely Park.

How Do You Achieve Your Objectives?

Once you have mapped out your objectives, you can determine the activities you should be doing to achieve them. Activities are:

- Linked to particular objectives
- Focused on specific tasks
- Feasible and appropriate

Example: Send invitation letters to the presidents of all of the community groups working in or around Lovely Park.

Goals	For the Park	For Your Group
Short-Term Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removing graffiti • Planting flowers • Cleaning up trash • Replacing missing bench slats • Painting fences, benches, playscapes, and recreation centers • Hosting a concert, neighborhood gathering or other performance • Sponsoring a Little League tournament or other sporting event • Volunteering for after-school programs • Cleaning park sculptures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting your park supervisor and manager • Create an Adopt-a-Park program with your Parks Department • Holding regular, well-attended meetings • Creating a membership mailing list • Creating lists of useful phone numbers • Introducing your group to elected officials, schools and faith communities • Becoming familiar with your local police • Finding a charitable umbrella organization to facilitate future fundraising • Writing your by-laws
Mid-Range Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting regular work days (every week, or month) • Buying tools and supplies (shovels, rakes, paint, etc.) • Buying and planting shrubs and trees • Making small landscape design changes • Creating and maintaining a community garden area • Increasing police presence • Hosting a performance series, large festival, or sports tournament • Repairing or replacing equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening a bank account • Winning a small grant • Holding elections • Recruiting a board of directors • Expanding your membership • Charging membership fees • Sending out a mailing • Hosting a small fundraising event • Developing strong working relationships with the police, elected officials, merchants, civic groups, schools, churches, etc. • Soliciting mid-size contributions from landlords and business owners • Getting a local newspaper to write an article about you
Long-Term Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising money for a major renovation or redesign • Attracting programs like Arts in the Parks • Hosting a regular summer program for kids (e.g. arts and crafts) • Buying expensive equipment (e.g. a riding lawnmower) • Buying and planting a large number of trees • Creating a citizens safety patrol • Completely taking back the park from crime • Installing public art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winning a large grant • Publishing a regular newsletter • Hosting a large fundraising event • Really expanding your membership • Getting 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status • Hiring paid staff • Compiling an archive of your accomplishments (photographs, newspaper articles, flyers, etc.)

Structuring Your Organization

Organization and Leadership: How Formal Should You Be?

Informal groups that pick up garbage and plant flowers on an irregular basis can do a very good job of beautifying the park without ever giving themselves a name. However, if your group has larger goals, like renovating the playground or combating crime, you're going to need more structure. Structure is also important for goals that require fundraising.

Elements of Structure

- **A Name (and a Logo).** A name makes your group official and a logo helps others visualize your mission. Having a name gives you a way to get credit for what you do and allows supporters to find you more easily.
- **Elected Leadership.** Elections make your group inclusive. Regular elections also mean that a leader can pass on the torch before he or she burns out.
- **Committees.** A great way to delegate responsibility and find new leaders. By spreading the work, responsibility, and credit among many people, committees let you get a lot more done.
- **Regular Meetings.** Meetings allow group leaders to check in with each other and enable them to report back to the general membership and ask for their input. Meetings keep your organization from turning into a one-person show.
- **Official Memberships.** By officially recognizing members and letting them know that they *are* members, you create a support group: people who can volunteer, people to send mailings to, people you can ask to donate, and people you can call "members" when asking someone else for money. By showing you have a critical mass of support, outside donors are more likely to contribute to your organization.
- **Regular Communications.** As your group gets bigger, you'll need ways to make the general membership feel like they're in the loop. Newsletters and bulletins are an important tool for holding on to your membership and for sending to people you want to attract. Google Groups and other **LISTSERV™** software are cost-effective and popular ways of communicating within your group. A printed newsletter will help reach new members and people outside your neighborhood.

- **Legal Stuff.** This category includes important documents, such as a bank account, a budget, "the books," and tax returns.
- **Records.** File the letters you've written and received; newspaper articles; flyers; photographs; membership lists; and so forth. If your group is to continue to exist through the years, you must have a way of passing on important information.

By-Laws: The Foundation of Your Organization

Although casual, informal parks groups can run well without by-laws, more organized groups find that by-laws, even simple ones, are needed to give their group the structure they need. By-laws can be short and sweet or long and detailed. Your core planning group should decide how much information to put into the by-laws based on your organization's needs. Though some groups choose to write highly legalistic by-laws right away, it's probably best to start simple and let the by-laws get more complicated as the group does.

For examples of by-laws you can use as a template for drafting your own, visit the Foundation Center website: www.fdncenter.org.

Why Write By-Laws?

- By-laws spell out an organization's purpose, its decision-making procedures, and its leadership structure. This can be helpful for groups which anticipate multiple changes in leadership (such as a youth group) or an influx of new members.
- By-laws are required in order to incorporate or get tax-exempt status.

Elements of By-Laws:

- Group's mission/purpose
- Membership requirements (such as residency of a particular neighborhood, age restrictions, and the like)
- Organizational structure (officers, election procedures, and so forth)
- Meeting time/frequency
- How decisions are made
- Procedure for amendments to the by-laws

Each member of the group should receive a copy of the by-laws when they join.

Leadership and Committees

Interim Leadership—Your Core Group

Newly-formed groups are often several dedicated people coming together around a common idea, who informally share leadership or let leaders emerge. As the group's membership increases and sets more challenging goals, more formal leadership structure is often necessary. In addition to electing central leadership positions, groups are able to involve more members in goal-setting and decision-making by forming committees.

Elected Leadership

Hold an election when the group feels stable and established, when you've got members who regularly attend meetings, and when you've found out whom you can count on and who has strong leadership skills. All groups should have a president and a treasurer; the rest is up to you. You may elect members to a general steering committee or to specific positions. Your by-laws should explain the group's leadership structure.

Interim Committees

Members of your core group should each be responsible for different tasks, such as writing by-laws, planning the first event, or contacting important people. As the core group increases in size, you can assign more than one person to each of these tasks, creating *interim committees*. Interim committees might be formed around the following:

- Building membership
- Logistics (finding a regular meeting space, building a mailing list, and so forth)
- Finance (opening a bank account, finding a fiscal sponsor, and so forth)
- Building a website

Standing Committees

When your group feels stable, has dedicated members who regularly attend meetings, and has decided upon common goals, it may be time to establish permanent committees. These are called *standing committees*, and should be formed around tasks that are central to your group's mission. Standing committees are part of an organization's permanent structure. Each committee should be led by a chairperson. For a typical parks group, standing committees might be formed around some of the following:

- Beautification (gardening and cleaning)
- Membership (recruitment and management)

- Fundraising/Finance
- Publicity and Public Relations (deals with press, advertises events)
- Safety (locks the park at night, works with police)
- Ecology (concerned with restoration and education in natural parks)
- Newsletter
- Event Planning

Ad Hoc Committees

Some projects come and go, so the committees that deal with them should come and go as well. These *ad hoc* committees can be formed by the steering committee whenever they are needed, and dissolved when they stop being useful. A chairperson also leads these committees. Tasks for *ad hoc* committees could include:

- Leading a membership drive
- Becoming a 501(c)(3)

Making the Most Out of Meetings

What Makes a Good Meeting

- Meetings should have a purpose. The group should be trying to accomplish a specific, defined objective. Meeting for meeting's sake wastes time and drives people away.
- Agendas should be directly related to the meeting's purpose. For example, if the purpose of a group's monthly meeting is to reinforce people's ties to the group, the meeting should be more social and less administrative.
- The group should all be aware of, and agree to, the meeting's purpose. Circulate the agenda beforehand to make sure this is the case.
- Allow for social time before or after the meeting.
- Be realistic about the agenda; prioritize goals and seek to accomplish only what's feasible within **an hour or less**.
- Make sure everyone has a chance to participate and be heard. One way to do this is make time on the agenda for everyone at the meeting to share a piece of news or a highlight.

Running Good Meetings

- **Set Ground Rules.** It can be very helpful to agree on procedural rules before beginning any substantive

conversation, for example: no interruptions, share air time, all decisions by consensus, and so forth.

- **Always Start and End on Time.** Starting on time is very important. If people see that the meeting consistently starts late, they will start showing up late—and they will be frustrated at the outset that the meeting is not well-run.
- **Read the Group’s Body Language.** If people seem bored or tired, you may need to change the pace of the meeting.
- **Stick to the Agenda.** People want to feel as if someone is in control of the meeting—so if the group is going over time on a topic, remind them of the agenda that the group agreed on. Ask the group if they want to alter the agenda or table an issue.
- **Make Sure that People Can Make a Point Without Being Interrupted.** Try to ask the opinions of people who don’t volunteer to speak.

Dealing with Conflict

- When you are confronted with a difficult person or a conflict, don’t get personal; remain in the framework of the meeting, the ground rules, and the agenda.
- Thank the person for his or her thoughts; refer back to the established ground rules and politely and firmly remind the person that he or she is moving away from the agenda or breaking one of the rules.
- If a discussion between two or more people gets very heated, step in and summarize each point of view. Ask the group if they want to continue discussing the question. Remind people of the ground rules. Try to take the emotion out of the air with a calm tone.

Making Decisions

- It is important to allow for ample discussion so that everyone feels their voice has been heard; at the same time, meetings need to have conclusions. Again, read the group’s body language to get a sense of whether they are ready to move on.
- Help the group move to action/decision by summarizing the points that have been expressed and stating the decision that has to be made in clear terms. Ask if anyone has any last comments, then move to make a decision.
- If the group makes decisions by consensus, poll the members for their views then summarize the group’s decision.

C. FUNDRAISING ADVICE FOR PARK FRIENDS GROUPS

Putting Together a Fundraising Plan

1. Get Help

- You’ll need a committee to develop your plan. More people involved in planning means more connections to resources, more help getting things done, and more people who feel responsible for the park.

2. Determine Your Goals

- What **specifically** do you want to raise money for? Kids’ programs? Plants? A concert? Write down one or two clear, concise sentences that answer this question. When you’re raising money, people will want to know why. This exercise will help you develop a clear answer to their question.

For example, “We seek to increase the liveliness of our park with a series of concerts for families.”

3. List Your Needs

- Think about all the things (goods and services) you’re going to need to achieve your goal, and write them down. Then think about what each thing will cost if you can’t get it donated.
- For example, if you are putting on a concert, you’ll need **publicity**, **materials** (chairs, a stage, sound equipment), and **labor** (musicians’ fees).

4. Determine Your Resources

- What do you already have? Is someone in your group a graphic designer who can design your program? Will musicians donate their time to play in your concert? What you don’t have is what you need donated.
- Make a list of all the people, businesses, and organizations in your community that can help you. Cover all the bases. Look to local businesses, banks, newspapers, utilities, places your members work, all of your neighbors, important people in the community, landlords, schools, communities of faith, other community groups, local government, the police athletic league, and foundations.

5. Create a Plan

- Whom are you going to ask for what? How are you going to ask them? Who's going to do the asking? When? The answers to these questions constitute your fundraising plan.
- For example, you might decide that you'll seek money for postage from the local bank branch where your group has an account, and ask the local copy shop to donate the copies of the program. The leader of your group might ask the bank for help, while the graphic designer, who gives the copy shop a lot of business, should/ approach them.

Fundraising Plan:

1. Treasurer to approach local bank branch
2. President to approach local art school
3. Secretary to obtain application for funds

Approaching Local Businesses

1. Develop Strong Relationships with Local Businesses

- Before you ask for donations, **cultivate your relationships**. Go door to door introducing yourself. Make sure businesses near your park

get your group's flyers and newsletters. Attend meetings of any local merchants' associations or business improvement districts and invite their representatives to your meetings.

- **Ask local merchants for their input**, especially those who work near the park and have a vested interest in its condition. Invite a representative of the local business community to join your group or your board. Involved businesses are much more likely to support you financially.

2. Approach Businesses that Are Likely to Give. Especially:

- **Businesses Near the Park.** This includes stores, but also the landlords and co-ops that own buildings bordering the park.
- **Businesses Where Your Members and Friends Work.** Large corporations often donate where their employees volunteer.
- **Businesses with a Logical Link to an Event.** For example: a music store for a concert, a kids clothing store for an after-school program, a hardware store for a spruce-up.
- **Branches of Local Banks and Your Local Utility.** Banks usually give small grants to community groups at the beginning of the year.

Sample Fundraising Plan

GOAL: Put on three concerts in the park.

Needs	Existing Resources	Possible Resources
✓ Bands/performers x3	✓ Photocopier at group president's office	✓ Local art school for performers
✓ Posters/flyers x500 x3	✓ Chairs & rain location through faith community	✓ Local bank branch for funds
✓ Stage	✓ Sstage, sound & power through Parks Department	
✓ Sound system & electrical hookup		
✓ Chairs for performers		
✓ Rain location		

A bank branch manager is a great person to have on your board.

3. Give Something in Return

Publicity. Publicly acknowledge helpful businesses at an event, in your newsletter, or on flyers.

- **Promotional Opportunities.** Allow businesses to give out coupons and free samples at an event—**make sure to ask the parks agency first**—or let them use your mailing list. You can also sell ads in a newsletter.
- **Community Goodwill.** Spread the word to members and neighbors about the business's generosity and be sure to patronize the businesses yourself. An article in the local paper does this very well.
- **Your Thanks.** Always send a thank you letter or gift.

Writing a Grant Proposal

Writing a grant proposal can be an intimidating process. While all funders have their own requirements, most proposals stick to a general format, outlined below. Be sure to follow the format the funder requests *exactly*, answering all questions clearly and specifically.

It is important to remember that most grants receive many more applications than can be funded. Be sure you meet the guidelines of the grant you are seeking. And do everything you can to make sure that if you are not funded it is for reasons you cannot control—not because you misspelled the name of the funder!

Tips to Remember When Writing Proposals:

1. Design Your Project Well

- Clearly describe your project and your plan. Know what you want to accomplish, who will benefit, and the specific tasks involved. Provide a timetable and a budget.
- Be realistic. Funders will be most impressed by a project that your group is clearly capable of handling.

2. Make Your Proposal Engaging and Easy to Read

- Use your proposal to tell a story. Remember, the funder knows nothing about your project. Paint a picture.

- Make the proposal as easy to read as possible—use clear headings and sub-headings.
- Write clear, declarative sentences using the **active voice**.
- **Yes:** “We will hold three concerts and collect names and addresses from sign-in sheets at the events.”
- **No:** “Three concerts will be held. Names will be collected on sign-in sheets.”

3. Follow Directions

- Get your application in on time; funders are serious about deadlines.
- Make sure to include all requested information, and don't put in things that you've been asked to leave out. Don't try to make square pegs fit into round holes—if your project doesn't fit the funder's criteria, you won't get funded.
- Choose your attachments carefully. Attach a handful of your best newsletters, flyers, press clips, etc. that demonstrate your group's overall credentials and specific ability to carry out the proposed project.

4. Be Positive

- Say, “We will,” not “We hope to.”
- Don't appear desperate. Funders like to support programs with a proven track record. Even when seeking funds for new initiatives, demonstrate how your past efforts show that you'll be able to succeed this time around.
- Funders like to be part of a good idea; they don't respond well to the argument, “If you don't fund us, the project won't happen.”

5. Get a Second Opinion

- Have someone unconnected to your group read your completed application. You may understand what you're talking about, but a stranger may not.
- Proofread thoroughly—your presentation (neatness, spelling) matters *a lot*.

6. Call the Funder with Any Questions

- The administrators of most small grants programs are more than happy to answer your questions—do not be afraid to call them.

Basic Proposal Format

I. Summary (one page)

- A concise overview of the entire proposal
- Make a good first impression using clear, compelling language
- Write the summary last, when you have already written the proposal

II. Introduction (half a page)

- Introduce your organization—your history, your achievements, your mission
- Establish credibility—show that the funder’s money will be well-spent
- Show how the project for which you are seeking funding flows from your organization’s mission

III. Needs Assessment (half a page)

- Show why the project you want to undertake is important and how it meets the needs of the community you are targeting
- Provide evidence—use statistics (be sure they are accurate!) and stories—but be careful not to overwhelm the reader with figures

IV. Goals and Objectives (half a page)

- Identify the goal of the project—the final result you want to achieve
- Outline the specific objectives—concrete, measurable targets—that you plan to accomplish along the way, using bullet points

V. Methods (one to four pages)

- The heart of your proposal—a step-by-step description of what the project will do and how
- Include **where** and **when** the project will take place, and **who** will be involved in implementing the project

VI. Evaluation (half a page)

- How you will measure the success of the project
- Identify the methods you will use to evaluate the project’s achievements, such as surveys, photos, attendance records, and so forth.

VII. Budget

- List the specific items you will need to accomplish the project, along with their costs
- here should be no surprises here. All items should reflect the description of the project in the Methods section.

VIII. Attachments

- Attachments can be used to flesh out your proposal with more information about your group and its achievements.
- Don’t overwhelm the funder with too many superfluous attachments—include a few key pieces.
- Examples of good attachments include press releases or flyers from previous events, letters of support from government officials or other groups, copies of your group’s newsletter, and press clippings about your group.

7. Keep Records

- Make sure you keep a copy of the completed application and attachments for your records

8. Maintain the Relationship with the Funder Whether You Receive the Grant or Not

- Remember that applying for small grants is a very competitive process. Many programs aren't funded simply because available funds are limited.
- If you don't get the grant, it can be useful to call the funder to find out why so that you can write a better application next time. Remember to send a thank you note even if rejected

- Most of these events are “friend-raisers” more than fundraisers; overhead costs are high and it is often the case that you raise very little money for your group—or even lose money.
- That said, such events can increase your group's presence in the community, bringing in new members.

Raising Money from Individuals

1. Network

- Create a list of all of your members and potentially helpful people you know.
- Keep in touch. Stay in regular contact with your connections and membership so they don't forget about you. A **newsletter** does this job well.
- Always look for new friends. Have a **sign-in sheet at every event** and always keep your eyes open. One friends group got a one-thousand-dollar donation from a popular magazine because a member of the group served jury duty with the CEO.

2. Use Tiered Membership Fees

- Keep a modest price for basic membership so that it remains affordable to any park user.
- Offer a larger fee with benefits for potential donors. For example, if your basic membership fee is \$10 per year, offer a \$50 membership that includes a free t-shirt with the group's logo.

3. Mail Fundraising Letters after the Group Has Proven Itself

- People will be more likely to give you money if they know who you are and that you've done good things.

4. Have a Party

- Many groups immediately think of hosting a fundraising event to raise money.

Handling Money

The information in this section is a general guide only and should not be considered tax advice. Consult a qualified professional about your organization's legal/tax status and obligations.

To cash a check, your group must have either a bank account or an umbrella group.

Unless your group is attempting serious fundraising by applying for grants from foundations, you may not need to be a registered non-profit. For smaller groups with limited agendas, a fiscal sponsor or bank account may be enough.

Getting a Bank Account

- **First Steps.** Open a bank account in the name of your organization, **not** in the name of any individual, even if the bank tells you it would be easier. To open a bank account in your organization's name, you must first get an Employer Identification Number (EIN). To apply for an EIN visit www.irs.gov or call the IRS Forms Distribution Center at (800) 829-3676 and ask for Form SS-4.

Where to Bank

- Very large banks often don't like dealing with community groups because the amounts of money involved are so small.
- Your best bet is to approach a smaller, local bank, preferably one that you or one of your members already has an account with.

Banking Basics

- **Minimum Balance.** A typical account requires a certain amount to open and a minimum balance. If your balance falls under the minimum, they will charge a monthly maintenance fee. Some basic savings accounts accrue interest, generally at a rate under 2%.
- **Monthly Maintenance Fee.** This can be really important. You should look for a bank that offers a low

minimum balance and low or no maintenance fees, because high fees can quickly deplete your funds. Ask the branch manager about getting fees waived because you are a neighborhood volunteer organization. It is always a good idea to form a relationship with your branch manager, who may also have money to give as grants to neighborhood groups.

- **Multiple Signatures.** It is a good idea to require two signatures when withdrawing money. This minimizes possible abuse and loss of funds. Having three signatures registered with the bank will make it easier for your group to get the two signatures necessary to sign for a withdrawal.

Type of Account

- A **savings account**—as opposed to a checking account—will have a lower opening minimum (the amount required to open an account), a lower minimum balance (the amount that has to be maintained in order to avoid paying a monthly fee), and a lower monthly maintenance fee (a fee imposed if you fall below the account minimum).
- You can easily obtain a cashier's check or money order from your bank in order to pay periodic bills.

Remember: Getting a bank account does not make you a tax-exempt non-profit organization. Do not tell donors that you are a non-profit; they cannot claim a tax deduction for their donation. For tax-exempt status without filing the paperwork, try using a fiscal sponsor.

Getting a Fiscal Sponsor

A fiscal sponsor is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization that will accept money on your behalf and then write checks when you need to purchase supplies or reimburse you for money spent. With a fiscal sponsor, your group can more easily receive donations and apply for grants.

- **Donations to your group that go through a fiscal sponsor are tax deductible.** This makes you eligible for grant money and more attractive to other donors.
- Ask another organization in your neighborhood—such as a block association or community non-profit—that you work with, trust, and know well to be your fiscal sponsor.
- Be very specific about this arrangement; some sponsors will take 5-15% of any donation to you as a fee for their services. It is best to get the agreement in writing.

- **Checks that will go through the fiscal sponsor must be made out to the sponsor directly**, though your group name should appear either in the memo, or in the “To:” line, for example: “To: 53rd Street Block Association—Friends of St. James Park.”

D. BECOMING A TAX-EXEMPT NON-PROFIT

The information in this section is a general guide only and should not be considered tax advice. Consult a qualified professional about your organization's legal/tax status and obligations.

When you receive 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service, your group will likely not have to pay federal taxes. You can also get exemption from state taxes, meaning you won't have to pay sales tax. **Perhaps the most important aspect of tax-exemption is that donations to your group are tax-deductible.** Many foundations will only give grants to 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations.

Although having a fiscal sponsor gets around this problem, tax-exemption removes the hassle of dealing with sponsors, many of whom take a percentage of any donation as a fee for services.

On the other hand, obtaining tax-exempt status is a relatively arduous process. Unless your group is attempting serious fundraising, you may not need to be a registered non-profit. For smaller groups with limited agendas, a fiscal sponsor or bank account may be enough.

Incorporation—the First Step

In order to incorporate, your organization must have a certain formality: a board of directors, officers, and by-laws. (For more information about creating this structure, see “Structuring Your Organization” on page 6.)

To Incorporate

- The requirements for forming and operating a non-profit corporation are governed by state law. For more details on incorporating in your state, contact your secretary of state or state attorney general's office.

Tax Exemption—the Second Step

- Becoming tax-exempt requires filling out a lot of complicated forms. At this point, you will most likely need the help of a lawyer.
- If your group does not have a member or friend who is able to provide these services *pro bono* (for free), contact your local library to help identify public interest law firms in your area.
- Keep in mind that public interest law firms often have a backlog of cases and it can be much faster to network and find a local lawyer who is willing to help you out.

To Become Tax-Exempt:

- Your group must become incorporated with your state. All tax forms can be obtained from the IRS by calling 1-800-829-3676; additional (recorded) information can be obtained by calling 1-800-829-1040. Tax forms can also be downloaded directly from the IRS Web site at www.IRS.gov.
- Your organization must have an Employer Identification Number (EIN). To apply for an EIN visit www.irs.gov or call the IRS Forms Distribution Center at 800-829-3676 and ask for form SS-4.
- File Form 1023. This is a huge booklet, but you do not have to file the whole thing. The booklet is divided into categories, depending on the kind of organization you are.
- File Form 2848, which assigns power of attorney to an individual who will act as your group's representative. It's best if this person is someone with relevant expertise, like a lawyer or an accountant.

- Be sure you follow through: you are not tax-exempt upon filing—you must receive your determination letter from the IRS. However you may apply for grants and receive tax-exempt funds while you are waiting for this letter if you have filed within the last 12 months.

Obligations of a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization

Federal Obligations

- Groups with an annual operating budget of \$25,000 or higher are required to file **Form 990**, which is basically like a 1040 for a nonprofit organization, and is available online at www.irs.gov.
- Smaller organizations (whose receipts are \$25,000 or less) must submit an annual electronic notice using Form 990-N Electronic Notice (e-Postcard) for Tax-Exempt Organizations not required to file Form 990 or 990-EZ. For more information about the e-Postcard, go to www.IRS.gov.
- Note that the annual operating budget is calculated on a five-year average, so that if you receive one large grant you may not have to file Form 990 if your budget in subsequent and previous years is substantially lower.

State Obligations

- States differ in their specific regulations and obligations for non-profit organizations. To determine how to register your non-profit with the state and understand further obligations, visit your state government website.

Part II: How to Develop Leaders and Build Allies

A. FOSTERING LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

What Makes a Leader?

The Purpose of Leadership

Groups without leaders or with poor leadership fall apart or go nowhere.

- Leaders bring groups together to work towards a common purpose, keep the group on track, and foster participation by all its members.
- Leaders help group members get to know one another, communicate openly and effectively, and expand their skills.
- Leaders help members understand the phases of group development (see “Leadership and Group Development”) and assist in working through the phases successfully.
- Leaders help the group evaluate itself, its members, and its program.
- The group benefits when its leaders grow as individuals, too. Group leaders need to continually learn, take risks, share their skills, and evaluate themselves.

Key Leadership Qualities

- **Character:** trustworthy, reliable, honest
- **Conceptual skills:** a clear vision of the big picture, the goal everyone is working towards
- **Good judgment:** a willingness to make hard decisions after listening to everyone’s input
- **Track record:** a history of achieving results
- **Maturity:** level-headed, not emotional, works well with all individuals
- **People Skills:** an ability to communicate, motivate, and delegate
- **Awareness:** of self, of others, and of the “playing field”

Leadership Roles

Often, the most important role for the leader of a community group to play is that of *convener*. While leaders of companies or organizations with paid staff are expected to achieve certain results or take their staff in

new directions, a community group leader must bring different partners together while keeping an eye on the big picture to help their group succeed.

In addition to this position, leaders may play a variety of other roles within a group, depending on their personality and the group’s needs. Generally, leadership roles fall into three categories: Task, Maintenance, and Individual Roles.

Task Roles: Achievement-Oriented

- **Facilitator:** helps the group make decisions and take action.
- **Entrepreneur:** enthusiastic, creative and engaging. All things are possible to this member.
- **Quality Control:** questions, inspects and challenges ideas and decisions to keep the group focused.
- **Doer:** task oriented and gets things done.

Maintenance Roles: Relationship-Oriented

- **Team Builder:** brings the group together and focuses on consensus.
- **Synthesizer:** blends the individual ideas to provide an overall group plan.

Individual Roles: Personal-Development-Oriented

- **Mentor:** helps individuals within the group find ways to expand their skills and resources.
- **External Contact:** provides access to resources outside the group.

Leadership and Group Development

Just like people, groups change and evolve over time. Psychologist Bruce Tuckman’s² well-accepted theory of group development identifies four phases a group can be in at any given time in its development: *Forming*, *Storming*, *Norming*, and *Performing*. A group can move from one phase to another in any order, and often moves back and forth between phases. Understanding these stages is important to understanding group behavior, and the interpersonal experience of group members. The table below describes the different leadership skills needed for each phase.

² University of North Dakota Extension School:
<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yf/leaddev/he497w.htm>

Phase	Leader's Activities and Roles
<p>1. Forming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Orientation phase for members—a time to define membership and identify similarities and differences ✓ High expectations, some anxiety—“Where do I fit in?” “Do I belong?” “Will I be included?” ✓ Unsure if they can commit to the group's goals ✓ High dependency on the leader 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage high energy, and asking questions • Establish a safe group environment and let members get to know each other • Work with group members to clarify goals of the group • Establish realistic expectations for achievement, project timelines • Empower members, solicit their opinions, and help establish guidelines for performing tasks • Identify skills and assets each member can bring to the group <p>Task, Maintenance, & Individual Roles: Facilitator, Doer, Team Builder, Entrepreneur, Mentor</p>
<p>2. Storming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Disappointment with unmet expectations ✓ Members are more comfortable expressing their opinions ✓ Frustration about unrealistic goals ✓ Dissatisfaction with the leader ✓ Competing for power and attention, individuality, and influence 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassess group's goal-setting process—celebrate successes and re-evaluate goals • Set small, attainable short-term goals to foster morale • Delegate responsibility to encourage shared authority • Encourage <u>effective</u> communication; listen to grievances • Be confident that the group will survive this stage • Deal directly with conflicts that arise • Remain objective and do not take challenges personally <p>Task, Maintenance, & Individual Roles: Facilitator, Entrepreneur, Quality Control, Team Builder, Mentor</p>
<p>3. Norming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Establishing group identity ✓ Establishing roles of members ✓ Establishing group v. individual responsibilities ✓ Testing the leader—other leaders begin to emerge ✓ Come to care for each other in more than a superficial way ✓ Conflict may be present but not openly stated ✓ Concerned with how close they can be and how much they can trust each other 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow participatory decision-making regarding group rules • Reinforce trusting relationships, encourage communication • Reconfirm group's commitment to its common goals • Continue activities that empower group members, provide a vision of a high-performing team • Help build decision-making and conflict resolution skills • Continue to reinforce trusting relationships and open communication <p>Task, Maintenance, & Individual Roles: Facilitator, Entrepreneur, Team Builder, Synthesizer, Mentor</p>
<p>4. Performing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Achieved a degree of harmony ✓ Resolving differences; sharing responsibility and control ✓ Feeling excited about working together as a team ✓ Sharing leadership ✓ Showing high confidence in achieving goals ✓ Begin to see the results of the work 	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage shared and increased responsibility through committees and delegation • Provide “big picture” leadership while committees handle the smaller stuff • Help members develop skills that will be rewarding to the individual and beneficial to the group • Challenge the group to take risks • Generalize and document learning • Continue to guide the group • Be aware of group needs for improvement <p>Task, Maintenance, & Individual Roles: Facilitator, Doer, Entrepreneur, Quality Control, Team Builder, Synthesizer, Mentor, External Contact</p>

Communication for Leadership

Good communication involves both giving and receiving information, so that we may clearly share ideas. A well-functioning group works when members feel that their views are being heard and addressed, and a leader must communicate effectively to achieve this.

Giving Feedback

- **“I” messages** allow us to tell people what impact their behavior has on us without judging them while letting them decide whether to change that behavior. We describe our responses and do not evaluate behavior or suggest changes. We are not forcing others to accept our ideas.
- **Asking for more information** enables others to expand on initial information. Doing so tells the speaker we are interested in his or her thoughts.
- **Paraphrasing** is saying what we think the speaker said, giving the speaker a chance to confirm our interpretation or to clarify what was meant.
- **Sharing information** assures that everyone’s input is important. Group leaders need to be as open and honest as other members
- **Checking feelings** enables us to check to see if the emotion we think we see is the correct interpretation.
- **Reporting feelings** tells others what your emotional state is at a given time.
- **Offering or requesting more options.** Even good ideas can be made better when more people are involved. Suggesting other options is helpful.
- **Active listening** lets the speaker know we are concentrating on her/his message.

Active Listening Skills

Listening is not just hearing what people are saying, but also interpreting messages they may be sending through body language, tone of voice, and so forth.

- Focus your attention on the speaker to show you are listening.
- Ask for more information to allow the speaker to clarify and show that you are interested.
- Paraphrase to clarify what the speaker said.
- Check feelings—*“You sound frustrated. Would you like to talk about that?”* But make sure the group continues to make achievements, and doesn’t get off track.

- Report your own feelings—let people know where you’re coming from.
- Seek the input of the whole group on a difficult issue.

Keep Information Simple

- People can only absorb so much information at a sitting—don’t overwhelm them with details.
- Stick to the point and avoid going off onto tangents. If someone brings up a related but different topic, table it until the first topic is finished.
- When presenting information, summarize, repeat key points a few times, and only offer as much information as is needed (without making people feel you are holding something back).
- Ask someone else in the group to interpret your presentation to be sure that the group understands.
- Offer particularly complex or intricate information in more than one format—with a written handout as well as a verbal summary, for example.

Encouraging Participation

Every group has its quiet members, but a good leader works to draw out even these “silent types” to be sure all views are heard. How groups come to a decision is also important for making people feel they are being heard. Whether you choose consensus or majority rule, be sure the procedure is implemented fairly. There are a few ways to do this:

- **Round Robin**—Go around the table asking for each member’s input. Members may pass, but no one may speak a second time until everyone has been heard from.
- **Small Group Breakouts**—the group divides into smaller groups to discuss a question then one person from each small group presents the results. Be sure to give plenty of time for the discussions and divide into groups of no more than six people.
- **Brainstorming**—encourage all members of the group to come up with as many ideas as possible in a short period of time. A volunteer writes key words from the ideas on a large piece of paper. Creative, “off-the-wall” ideas are encouraged.

Brainstorming “Rules”

- Collect as many ideas as possible—repeats are okay. The greater the number of ideas, the greater the likelihood you’ll get some winners.

- All ideas are welcome, no matter how silly or far out they seem. Complete freedom stimulates more and better ideas.
- No discussion of items during the brainstorming activity. Reserve this for later to keep ideas flowing.
- No criticisms or judgments of other people's ideas.

Leadership and Conflict Management

Conflict is an inevitable part of any group's development. The presence of conflict isn't necessarily a bad sign—differences of opinion, style, or approach can lead to creative solutions and a more energized group. People tend to think that conflict is terrible for groups and should be avoided at all costs. Good leaders can help people relax around conflict, instilling confidence in the group's members that the conflict will eventually be resolved, and even while the conflict exists the group can still function and even thrive.

What Causes Conflict?

Generally, the root cause of all conflicts is a feeling by one party that his/her needs are not being met. Needs tend to fall into three basic categories:

- **Substantive Needs:** concerns about tangible benefits. "I joined this group to make sure the park was safe at night for kids—why isn't there a safety committee yet?"
- **Procedural Needs:** concerns about a process for interacting, making decisions. "Are we just going to go along with what you say because you're the president? What does the group think?"
- **Psychological Needs:** concerns about how one is treated, respected. "I've had my hand raised for ten minutes and people continue to talk out of turn!"

Preventing Conflict:

While some conflict in a group setting is inevitable, and even welcome, a good leader can create an atmosphere that helps avoid those conflicts rooted in **procedural** and **psychological** needs.

- Foster an environment of open communication. Listen to all comments, even those that seem unhelpful or off-topic, and respond respectfully.
- Don't respond in kind to negative remarks, criticism, or inflammatory statements. Instead, try to acknowledge the content of the comment and turn it into a constructive remark.

- Avoid sweeping things under the rug—conflicts will and do arise.

Tips for Resolving Conflict

- **Acknowledge the presence of conflict and discuss it openly with the group.** If necessary, reframe the conflict to take out the emotion and open up the possibility of cooperative resolution.
- **Deal with one issue at a time.** A leader needs to guide the group through breaking down the conflict into separate issues. This will help people to feel their needs are being addressed.
- **Don't smooth over past issues.** If there is another problem from the past that is lurking behind the current conflict, identify it and list it as one of the things to be addressed.
- **Choose the right time for resolving the conflict.** At the same time, it's important for people to feel that meetings are productive and not devoted entirely to rehashing old issues. If something can be tabled while another project is being discussed, do it. People need to be ready to talk about a conflict before they can help resolve it.
- **Avoid resolutions that come too soon or too easily.** People need time to think about all possible solutions and the impact each possibility might have. Quick answers may disguise the real problem. All parties need to feel some satisfaction with the resolution if they are to accept it. Conflict resolutions should not be rushed.
- **Agree to disagree.** In some cases the effort required to settle a disagreement is so great it would jeopardize the entire group—in these cases it's better to agree to disagree.
- **Don't insist on being right.** There are usually several right solutions to every problem. A leader helps the group discover the solution that works best for the group, rather than forcing his or her views on everyone else.

Leadership for Transition

Groups are more than their leaders; a strong group can survive the departure of its leader, no matter how charismatic, with a good transition process. A key component of strong leadership is preparing the group for the leader's inevitable departure. The leader is a guide who captures the voice of the group and keeps them

steered on the right course—but the group is the engine, the force that sustains energy and momentum. Groups that have undergone successful leadership transitions offered the following tips for individual leaders:

Prepare for Transition from Day One

- **Build leadership capacity among the group.** Delegate tasks and activities to others to give them an opportunity to develop and showcase their skills.
- **Share responsibility.** While it's important that one person keep the proverbial “big picture” in mind, thriving groups often divide most of the responsibility among a steering committee or leadership board. Dividing responsibility and control helps foster leadership skills among other members of the group, and avoids too much reliance on a single person.
- **Consider term limits in your group's bylaws.** Not only do they prevent one person from dominating the leadership, they also motivate other people to step up into new roles. Remember, though, that people need time to adjust to a new position; be sure your terms are long enough to allow for a learning curve.
- **Always work to expand the membership base.** In this way, you will attract new candidates for leadership positions.
- **If a leader steps down** before her term is finished, she or he should give the group ample notice to prepare for the transition.

The Transition Process

- **Clarify the process and timing of elections** in the group's bylaws so that no one is surprised when a transition period draws near.
- **Clarify the roles of each position** (president, secretary, and so on) in the group's bylaws so that people know what each entails.
- **Nominate candidates well before elections** to give people an opportunity to get to know and feel comfortable with their choices.
- **Smooth the transition** by making official introductions of the new leader to key players, such as Parks staff, any past funders, and local elected officials.
- **Remain present in the group** after you step down so that your institutional knowledge isn't lost. Ideally, the past president should stay on the group's board or steering committee.

- **Let go!** Accept that the new leader won't do things in exactly the same way as you. Don't second-guess or undermine the new leader's authority.

B. BUILDING ALLIANCES

What Can Friends and Allies Offer?

1. Resources for Your Park and for Your Group

- **Presence.** Allies will come to the park and fill it with the life and activity essential for a healthy park.
- **People power.** Allies can become members, can help organize projects or events, or can volunteer in the park.
- **Partners.** Other organizations can bring their members to the park and to events and meetings your group sponsors. They can also let you send notices to the people on their mailing lists.
- **Funds.** Individuals can write checks, make in-kind donations, and get their friends and employers to do the same. Elected officials can fund programming in the park or a park renovation.

2. A Community that “Owns” the Park and Cares About It

When you reach out to people, you help them feel that the park is theirs, not somebody else's. When people feel a sense of ownership towards and responsibility for the park, they are more likely to treat it with respect—and speak up to those who don't.

3. Credibility

With the support of individuals and institutions around the park, you have more authority to speak on issues relating to the park than if you only represent tiny fraction of park users.

4. Power

Elected officials will want your support and recognition, and government agencies will be more responsive to you, if your group represents lots of people.

Potential Allies and Friends

Parks Employees

- Managers
- Supervisors
- Staff

Park Users

- Individual park users
- Schools/day care centers
- Sports leagues
- Bocce and chess clubs

Martial arts schools

- Hikers and birders
- Walkers and joggers
- Gardeners
- Property owners
- Business owners

Civic Associations

- Block, tenant, and neighborhood associations
- Other park groups in your area
- Merchants association or business improvement district
- Community gardens
- PTA
- Community development corporations
- Boys & Girls club
- Cultural organizations
- Churches, synagogues, mosques
- Senior citizens' groups
- Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis clubs

Elected Officials

- Councilmember/Supervisor/Park Commissioner or Board
- Mayor
- State Senators and Representatives
- U.S. Senators and Representatives

Police

- Precinct Community Affairs Officers
- Precinct Commander

Local Media

- Neighborhood newsletters
- Newspapers
- Radio and TV stations

Community Non-Profits

- Environmental groups
- Cultural groups

The Basics of Building Relationships

General Principles

These apply when dealing with any potential allies—civic organizations, local boards and commissions, elected officials, Parks & Recreation, the Police Department, and anyone else who could help you or your park.

1. Make Yourself Visible

Both you and your group should be known in the community. To raise your group's profile, hold public events and publicize them well. To raise your own profile, get involved with all kinds of groups and issues. The more you and your group do, the more contacts you'll have.

2. Keep People Informed

People get very upset when they feel they've been left out of the loop. Call, write, send out notices—do whatever it takes to avoid surprising people. An added benefit is that when you let people get involved in something from the beginning, they are more likely to become personally invested in plans and want them to succeed.

3. Build Personal Relationships

Remember that you are dealing with people, not just agencies or organizations. People will be stronger allies if they know and like you as a person. And keep in mind that building a strong relationship takes time and energy; it won't happen overnight.

4. Be a Good Listener

Focus first on understanding *other people's* needs and priorities. Listen carefully so that you can understand what drives the person or organization you want to enlist. Start with the individual—what personally motivates him or her? Likewise, what is the organization's focus?

5. Look for Win-Win Opportunities

Think of ways your needs mesh with others' needs. How can supporting the park help both you and your allies? For example, having a local bodega owner provide refreshments at your Summer Festival is good for both you and for him or her—if you publicize the bodega's support through your newsletter and on a sign at the event itself.

6. Build a "Bank Account" of Trust and Goodwill—and Don't Make Too Many Withdrawals!

Keep your word, and do favors for people when asked, if it's not too burdensome. People notice if you stick to your commitments. If you help someone out in some small way, especially if that person is in a pinch, they'll be likely to return the favor. But if

you're unreliable or self-centered, you'll burn bridges quickly. Keep in mind how often you're asking for favors, as opposed to giving them. Finally, ask for little things before you ask for big things.

7. Thank Anyone and Everyone.

Send thank you letters, make phone calls, recognize contributors at public events, note supporters on your flyers and newsletters, give certificates of appreciation, and hold thank you parties. If someone helped you in an official capacity, send a letter of commendation to his or her boss. When in doubt, give people *more* credit than they deserve.

Things to Keep in Mind When Dealing with Government Agencies:

1. Be Polite, Patient, and Persistent

You can catch a lot more flies with honey than with vinegar. Civility counts, and is essential for a good relationship. Screaming, insulting, and demanding may work once, but it rarely solves the problem in the long term. Sure, sometimes you've got a right to get angry. But it's risky, and should be a last resort.

2. Know Who Has the Power to Solve the Problem

When people seem to be unresponsive, it's often simply because they really can't do anything about the issue you are raising. Unfortunately, people don't always explain that. Know the chain of command in the agency you call, and move up the chain of command as appropriate. If you're uncertain who's in charge, be specific in your request, so you can find the person most able to deal with your problem.

3. Get to Know Different People at the Agency and Distinguish between Them

Some people at public agencies can be unresponsive or indifferent, but many others aren't. Just because the agency makes a decision you don't like, it's no reason to destroy good relationships you have built. View someone's actions in the context of your history with him or her. And keep in mind that many times people would genuinely like to help but can't because of limited resources.

Things To Keep in Mind When Approaching Elected Officials:

1. Look Professional

Give your organization a name, print official letterhead, type your letters, and keep a membership roster. Make sure the official knows that you represent a larger constituency. But don't bring your whole group to the meeting; you don't want to make the official feel he or she is being attacked.

2. Be Prepared

Research the official's voting record on the issues you are concerned with. Bring materials from your group to show that you are serious and committed.

3. Know the Details

Know specifically what you want and specifically why you think it's worth doing. If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say you will get the information after the meeting.

4. If the Official Is Unavailable, Meet with a Senior Staff Member.

Elected officials' staff can often have a great deal of influence.

Partnering with Parks and Recreation

Parks and Recreation Employees—Important Allies
A park does best when the community and Parks Department work together as a team. In fact, when asked about their most important relationships, parks volunteers will often tell you that it is crucial to know and work with Parks Department employees, especially their park's supervisor or manager. Managers and supervisors can provide supplies for workdays, create schedules for park maintenance, and talk to other government agencies on your behalf when necessary (for example, if you need additional lighting). Here are some suggestions for creating and nurturing your relationship with your Parks Department contacts:

- **Let Them Know Who You Are.** Introduce yourself and your group members. Set up a meeting to discuss your shared goals and visions for the park.
- **Find Out if your Parks Department Has an Adopt-a-Park Program.** Through a signed agreement, both your group and Parks Department will set specific goals and desired outcomes for your park.

- **Report Volunteers' Hours.** Parks Department employees are often given recognition for encouraging volunteerism. Elected officials and others will be pleased to receive information about how many people volunteered and how many hours were contributed. Ask your Parks Department contact if there is a formal way to report and document volunteer labor.
- **Keep Them in the Loop.** Parks Department personnel need to know what's going on in their area. Let them know what you're up to. Tell them far in advance when you are planning a workday or an event. Send them your newsletter. Remember, they can talk to you about more than just requests for supplies.
- **Know Their Schedules.** Many park managers and supervisors work from very early in the morning to mid-afternoon and are rarely in their offices. Find out from them the best time to reach them.
- **Thank Them Officially.** When parks personnel have been helpful, write them a thank you note. It is a good idea to send a copy to the director to make sure employees get recognition for their efforts. Likewise, if parks personnel are rude or unhelpful, let their supervisors know that as well.
- **Get to Know Other Park Workers.** In addition to park managers and supervisors, there may be a specific employee or seasonal worker who is assigned only to your park. Getting to know these employees will make your work easier.

C. BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN

Political Action, Lobbying, and Non-Profits

What is Lobbying?

The right to lobby is our nation's democratic form of government and is given to individuals and organizations under the First Amendment to the Constitution, which states:

"Congress shall make no law....abridging the freedom of speech....or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

The American League of Lobbyists explains it best by stating, "Lobbying is advocacy of a point of view, either by groups or individuals. A special interest is nothing more than an identified group expressing a point of view—be it colleges and universities, churches, charities,

public interest or environmental groups, parks and recreation organizations, even state, local or foreign governments." Direct lobbying is communication to legislators that expresses a view about a specific piece of legislation and asks them to take a specific action.

Many non-profit organizations fear the term "lobbying" and shy away from any kind of political action because they believe they are prohibited from doing so under federal law; however, federal law does not prohibit such activity. Advocating for an issue, spotlighting a problem, rallying on behalf of an idea, or educating elected officials on the facts of a particular issue are all permitted activities for 501(c)(3) organizations. IRS regulations state that a 501(c)(3) organization "may not attempt to influence legislation as a *substantial* part of its activities, and it may not participate at all in campaign activity for or against political candidates." The IRS allows for lobbying under two different sets of rules: The Substantial Part Test and the Expenditure Test.³

- **The Substantial Part Test.** This test is vague and allows the IRS to decide what activities constitute lobbying and how much lobbying is acceptable for 501(c)(3) organizations. Non-profits can potentially lose tax-exempt status if conducting more than an "insubstantial" amount of lobbying.
- **The Expenditure Test or 501(h) Election.** This test is preferable to the Substantial Part Test because it creates clear definitions, expenditure limitations, and measurable guidelines for lobbying activity. Depending on the size of the organization, the IRS permits 501(c)(3)s to spend up to \$1 million annually on lobbying activities. The expenditure test election is made by submitting IRS Form 5768. It does not have a negative effect on nonprofits and gives you more leeway when engaging in public policy.

Why Political Action?

Perhaps you are avoiding political action because you don't fully understand the lobbying law. Perhaps you and your group never considered the option. Horticulture societies, theater groups, recreation programs, and other such organizations may not see a need to get involved in the political process, yet on some level politics touches every organization.

³ W.K. Kellogg Foundation: <http://www.wkkf.org/Default.aspx?tabid=90&CID=280&ItemID=5000236&NID=5010236&LanguageID=0>

Elected officials and their staff must juggle an abundance of complicated issues without the luxury of time to become a subject matter expert. Who better to speak on important issues that impact the public than an organization comprised of “experts” from a particular trade or field?

Being savvy about the political process, knowing how to work with and within the system, can help your group achieve its goals, whatever they might be. “All politics is local,” is the famous saying. By the same token, all local issues are political issues. Getting involved at the local, state and federal level of government brings your voice to the decision-makers in your community, and allows your group to be heard.

Some ways your group might consider “getting political” include:

- Organizing a community meeting inviting your local elected officials to come and discuss your visions for the park/neighborhood;
- Inviting your elected officials to tour your park or recreation facility;
- Working with your local planning agency and elected officials to discuss how parks and recreation could play a role in community revitalization, such as turning an abandoned factory into a recreation center, or improving the waterfront in your community; and
- Organizing press conferences and rallies around budget hearings to let elected officials know that parks and green space are important to your community.

Conducting Lobbying Activities

Below are examples of various types of lobbying activity in which 501(c)(3) organizations are permitted to engage.

- Supporting or opposing a specific bill.
- Providing members with voting records of legislators.
- Neutral voter education activities, such as candidate forums, debates and questionnaires that offer all candidates for a particular office with equal opportunity for participation.

Note: 501(c)(3) organizations are prohibited from endorsing, contributing to, working for or lending support or opposition to a candidate.

Planning a Campaign: Timelines and Strategies

A campaign is a concerted effort focused on achieving a specific goal. Campaigns are often focused on particular elections, with a concrete timeline and a specific theme. During election season, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of different campaigns being conducted by organizations and lobbyists. To help you make your campaign successful, we’ve asked seasoned campaigners and community organizers for their ideas.

Phase I: Lay the Groundwork

1. Create a Platform

Your platform is the issue you are campaigning for—the “candidate” you are trying to “elect.” In creating your platform, remember that while your group has its specific concerns, you want to make your cause appeal to officials communitywide. Identify the larger issues represented by your group’s concerns. Develop a well-articulated platform, with both a general goal—such as “more money for parks,” which helps to foster partnerships—and specific “asks” that demand an explicit commitment from candidates.

Link your issue to the main topics of the campaign season—crime, education, and health care. Do your homework—cite strong research showing the power of parks and the facts behind the crisis. Make it easy for candidates to support parks by making their arguments for them. For example, link data showing how youth crime rates rise in the hours right after school with the fact that most park staff are off duty after 3 p.m. to argue for more staffing.

2. Analyze the Key Players

Prioritize among the key players. Who has **power to change the problem**? City agencies, for example, answer to the current Mayor; they can’t do anything without his or her approval. Elected officials and candidates, on the other hand, answer to voters. The staff of an elected official is more important to reach out to than the official. It is the staff who keeps track of constituents’ needs and issues. If you can set up a meeting with an official’s staff, you can be sure that the official will hear your concerns. (See “Partnering with Candidates and Elected Officials” on p. 25 for more on this topic.)

As you work on identifying the key players, also try to research the ways these players have been persuaded to change positions in the past. Has there been an example of an elected official responding to a petition? A meeting with community groups? Use the collective knowledge and memory of your group to tailor your approach accordingly.

Never write anyone off. Even if someone seems less influential now, they might change positions and become more helpful or powerful—avoid burning bridges.

3. Set Goals and Strategies

Be realistic—what is your time frame? What are your resources? Choose an ambitious, but practical, goal. Then map out a strategy for achieving it. Some goals might be:

- *Get a commitment from every candidate that he or she will commit to increasing the staff for parks.*
- *Get a commitment from all candidates that they will double the budget of parks in their first term in office.*
- *Get a commitment from all candidates that they will lower crime rates in parks.*

4. Set Objectives and Methods

When you've determined your goal, it's time to set objectives. These are specific, achievable steps to be executed within a specific time-frame. Think in terms of concrete numbers, for example:

- *Hold two rallies every month until the September primaries.*
- *Send fifty letters to each candidate by July.*
- *Get 5,000 signatures on a petition to present to the candidates at a forum to be held in August.*
- *Set small goals that are easily accomplished and will add up to a larger success. People get disheartened and drop out of campaigns when they don't feel they are making progress. Stick to your objectives—keep on doing things. Even events that don't have a political agenda can become tools for advocacy. For example, you can have a barbecue or a picnic and provide pens and paper for people to write letters.*

Phase II: Execute the Campaign

1. Build a Broad-Based Constituency

(See p. 27 for more information on building coalitions.)

2. Candidate Outreach and Education

- Distribute campaign literature and research to candidates; research the issues confronting their districts and respond to them.
- Develop a questionnaire of candidate positions and publicize candidates' answers to the campaign mailing list.

3. Develop a Web/Internet Presence

4. Hold Regular Events

5. Petitions

- Create a petition drive to show citizen support for parks.
- Have petition forms at every event and encourage endorsing organizations to get signatures.

6. Get Out the Vote

- Treat the issue of parks as a candidate and campaign throughout the community, just as any candidate would do. This includes massive literature drops—in housing complexes, parks, sports areas, subway stations—about parks and the various candidates' stances on it.
- Use the media to publicize candidates' positions on parks

Phase III: Evaluate and Plan Next Steps

You'll need to continually evaluate the choices you've made throughout the campaign. You may find that you've picked the wrong targets or the wrong approaches. So, be sure you are continually evaluating and adjusting, evaluating, and adjusting. No campaign is ever over! When the election is over, even if all the candidates who supported your cause were elected, there is still work to be done to be sure they stand by their commitments. Continual pressure—letters, events, rallies, speeches, press—keep your issue alive and keep it important in the eyes of elected officials.

Power-Mapping

The Art of Power-Mapping

Power-mapping will both help you to identify power relationships and show you how to influence them.

Mapping can help clarify a complex issue and identify those that have an investment in that issue. Also, by mapping out who you are trying to influence (your focus), and who influences them, you are able to identify where in the chain you have influence.

Once you identify the diversity of stakeholders, you can begin to link them together via the issues they care about. By mapping out sources of support and opposition, power-mapping will help you to determine exactly where and how you should focus your strategy and outreach.

1. Get yourself a thick marker and one or more large sheets of paper.
2. Identify your “focus”—who or what you are trying to influence. After you identify your focus write it in the center of the page. Your focus can be a specific person or a larger issue such as security in parks.
3. Who has a direct influence over your focus? If you are trying to influence the mayor, think about who influences him—for example, the city council or the voters. Write them down in the area around your focus.
4. Ask the question again for each individual or group you identify. Write down your responses in a logical manner. Repeat the power mapping exercise again for each individual entity.
5. Take a look at your page and look at all of the different groups or individuals listed, and the different paths you can take to reach your focus. Now you are able to identify whom you should reach out to and how you can better reach out to them.
6. Continually re-evaluate your power-map throughout the campaign.

Partnering with Candidates and Elected Officials

Approach candidates and elected officials as a potential ally, not as a supplicant. While you are certainly asking for something, you also have something to offer: **Votes**.

Your group represents a certain number of voters—the larger that number, the more powerful an ally you can be for candidates. Some other tips to keep in mind:

Know what you offer, and who you represent.

- Through your membership, your group represents visibility, publicity, and votes.
- Keep track of your membership, the size of your mailing list, the number of people who come to your events, and any other mechanisms you have for reaching out to a large number of community members.
- You can thank officials publicly in your newsletter and at events, letting your members know who supports them.

Develop a polite working relationship.

- Remember, political advocacy doesn't end with the election. You want the candidate who supports your cause to win—but you want that winner to continue to work with you for the duration of his or her term.
- After the election is over, continue to build your relationship with the winner.

Look professional.

- Make sure the official knows that you represent a larger constituency.
- Give your organization a name, print up official letterhead, type your letters, and keep a membership roster.
- Don't bring your whole group to the meeting; you don't want to make the official feel he or she is being attacked.

Be prepared.

- Research the official's voting record on the issues you are concerned with.
- Bring materials from your group to show that you are serious and committed.

Know the details.

- Know specifically what you want and specifically why you think it's worth doing.
- If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, say you will get the information after the meeting. Don't make something up.

Give the official a script—talking points, facts and figures.

- You want to make her job easy. And you also want to pin her down to specifics so that she can be held accountable later.

Focus on common goals.

- Whether you voted for the official or not, highlight similar interests that relate to the park.

If the official is unavailable, meet with a senior staff member.

- Elected officials' staff can often have a great deal of influence.

Give thanks and acknowledgment.

- Publicly thank elected officials for their support—with press releases, events, signs, and so forth.
- Not only does this gratify the official who has supported you, it can also help you garner more support by showing that you work well with others.

What Works, What Doesn't

A good rule of thumb is that candidates and officials pay attention to communication from voters in proportion to the amount of work the communication requires. For example, a signature on an e-mail petition requires almost no work, and politicians pay very little attention to those. Below is a list of effective ways to draw attention to your campaign.

Letters

- An incredibly effective tool. Even five letters from five different people on the same issue create a feeling among candidates and officials that there is a groundswell of support for that issue.
- Form letters **do not work**; the letters must each be different.

Press

- Can help alert candidates and officials to the presence of your group and your issue. You don't have to be written up in large newspapers to achieve results; candidates read the local papers too.
- These papers are always looking for copy and will publish letters to the editor and op-eds as well. (*For more details, see information on writing letters to the editor on p. 34.*)

Rallies

- Can be a great way to show that a large number of people care about an issue enough to stand outside (sometimes in bad weather!) and protest about it.
- Rallies make great press.
- Rallies can also give candidates and elected officials an opportunity to show their support for your issue—a great publicity tool for them, too, and a way to help them in return for their support.

Petitions

- While petitions don't carry as much weight with politicians as letters, they can be a very powerful tool for your own organization.
- Every person who signs a petition (and gives you their address) can be added to your group's mailing list, increasing the numbers of people your group represents.

Ribbon-cuttings

- These official openings of projects your group has raised money for are great opportunities for press coverage and for thanking your sponsors and supporters, including elected officials and candidates.
- A well-publicized ribbon-cutting shows people that you are an active group that makes a difference and can increase support for your group among the community.

Creating Coalitions

Strategic alliances with other groups in your neighborhood are one of the most important elements of any successful organization or campaign. By partnering with other groups to form a *coalition*, you not only gain resources and support, but also become stronger collectively. When groups or individuals decide to work together for a common purpose or issue, they can sometimes be more effective as an organized coalition. There is strength in numbers!

The key to a successful campaign of any size is being active at two different levels—a localized and specific level and a more general level. The coalition's activities at the broader level get media coverage, put the issue on the map, and show candidates that the coalition has political significance. Locally, participation in the campaign by individual community groups gives the coalition credibility and sustainability because most local groups

will already have established relationships with their community and will have resources to put into the coalition. Building strong, self-sufficient coalitions will not only strengthen the bonds between groups in the community, but also will help create a more cohesive parks advocacy movement communitywide.

Every area has different political and geographic landscapes that need to be considered when building coalitions around physical areas or similar interests. If your campaign spans a large geographic area, you may want to consider creating smaller groups that are in closer proximity. Depending on the size and scope of your campaign, you can create coalitions at a more localized level, such as by, election districts, or at a neighborhood level.

How to Build Successful Coalitions

- **Be as Broad as Possible.** The more groups and variety of groups that support or endorse the coalition, the more “people power” it has and the more legitimacy it holds in the eyes of elected officials and the public.
- **Don’t Recreate Relationships.** Build on existing neighborhood-based advocacy efforts or linkages with powerful people in the community to use as rallying points. Tap into the resources of religious leaders or community board representatives to get people involved.
- **Define Structure.** Define and engage the role of the coalition and its political focus or goals early in the process. This will help to solidify the coalition around a general infrastructure.
- **Facilitate, Don’t Dominate.** When organizing coalitions remember that your role is to provide support, not to dominate the agenda. There needs to be full and active participation by the other members of the coalition. If the coalition is not a joint effort with fair leadership giving all members a voice, it will not be successful.
- **Be Yourself.** Develop a role for the coalition of a coach or clearinghouse for the different constituencies—allowing them to retain their individual identities while finding a common ground between them. When groups keep their own identities, the coalition will appear to represent a much more diverse population.
- **Focus on the Big Picture.** It’s important to focus on the larger vision of the campaign, rather than the specific issues of each constituent. For example, when advocating for increased funding for parks, linking the recreation groups with the community garden groups becomes difficult if you talk about dividing resources right away and deciding who gets what. Instead, focus on how both groups are park users and would benefit from increased public funding for parks.
- **Go with What Works.** There is no one correct form or structure of a coalition. Your coalition can be as informal as just a few representatives of various groups united by a single issue for a short time, or an ongoing network of groups working together on multiple issues, or even as formal as having a written agreement and by-laws.
- **Get Technical: Create a Coalition Database.** A core database or mailing list is critical for creating a strong coalition or campaign. A database allows you to keep track of and contact your constituents in a more timely fashion, which is crucial in any campaign. Use the mailing lists of partner and founding organizations and supplement with on-line sign-ins, petition signatures, and responses to campaign flyers. (*See “Using Technology to Communicate More Effectively” on p. 38 for more details.*)

Part III: Developing Effective Communication and Outreach

A. MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD: USING THE MEDIA TO COMMUNICATE

Materials and Distribution: Getting Your Message Out

Your materials are your organization's calling card. If your materials are sloppy with misspelled words and incorrect facts you not only look unprofessional, you also lose credibility. Punchy, brief, easy-to-read materials draw people in and sell them on your cause.

To Maximize Impact:

Have a Variety of Materials

- You have dozens of options when choosing materials to promote your organization, including flyers, posters, calendars, postcards, palm cards, stickers, and pins—to name a few.
- Remember that different materials fit different situations. For example, at a parade or a rally, hand out stickers or pins because they are easy to distribute and are highly visible.
- At an event where you have more time to talk with individual people, such as having a table set up at the family day in your local park, use palm cards and flyers with more detailed information.

Develop a Catchy Campaign Image

Having a simple and catchy logo and tag line will help people to know what you are about right away and identify the campaign.

Be Concise

You want people to actually read the flyers you hand to them—make them simple and visually appealing.

Target Your Audience

Tailor your materials to target the particular audience you are trying to reach. For example, if you are going to an event with lots of parents, make sure your materials include facts and arguments that appeal to them, such as how safe parks can affect children's health and well being.

How to Fund Materials Production

Seek Innovative Sources of Funding

While there are grants available for materials production, it is often easier and faster to tap into the resources of your campaign and your community to pay for materials production.

Try Approaching Small Businesses

- Ask for in-kind contributions, such as printing or materials.
- Offer to credit the business on the printed materials you produce or thank them publicly for their support.

Reach Out to Your Own Membership Base

- Use the resources and talents within your organization.
- Look for volunteers that are graphic artists or talented with computers to design your flyers.
- Some of your members may have access to photocopy machines and can make copies of your flyers for free.

Visibility Events: Making an Impact

Fun, lively events help you to educate and involve more people in the campaign. Events can also energize the people who are already invested in the campaign and keep them involved. Most important, well attended, well-publicized events powerfully demonstrate to both the public and elected officials the breadth and depth of the constituency that supports your issue.

Tips for Successful Events

(For more detailed information, refer to "Event Planning Toolbox" on p. 53.)

Hold a Variety of Events

- With any campaign, it is important to stage large events in central locations, but it is also helpful to hold other events that are accessible to all members of your constituency.
- More localized events let groups come together on a neighborhood level to build their own momentum and get excited about being part of a larger campaign.

Invite VIPs to Speak at Your Events

Having public officials at your events not only helps to gain their support but also engages the community and promotes your campaign.

(See “Partnering with Candidates and Elected Officials” on p. 25.)

Invite the Media

Do extensive media outreach for your events. Events provide good visuals that will help you to get your picture in the paper or be featured on the news. (Refer to “Working with the Media: Getting ‘Ink’” on this page.)

Be Visible

- Carry hand-lettered signs to give a neighborhood feel to your campaign.
- Bring vivid photographs of your park or events your group has held.
- Hang a banner with the campaign name and logo in easy view.
- Use stickers to show the campaign’s presence in the crowd at each event where public officials will be present.
- Hand out flyers at parades, debates and community events.

Be Vocal

Be sure the people in the crowd are ready to approach key figures, such as candidates for public office or current public officials to talk about the issues.

Attend Events Other Than Your Own

- Being present at other, non-campaign-sponsored events, such as a candidate debate or neighborhood festivals, creates the illusion that you are everywhere; public officials will notice and respond.
- Most newspapers will advertise candidates’ public schedules and other important neighborhood events.

Event Ideas

Official Campaign Kickoff

Throw a big news conference or community rally to announce the start of your effort.

Elected Officials’ Forum or Debate

- If your campaign falls before an election, invite the candidates for public office to speak about and debate your issue at the height of the campaign season.
- Other appropriate times to hold a forum are before a public hearing or vote is scheduled, or at a monthly group meeting.
- While a forum lets candidates air their views, its most important function is to introduce candidates to the

depth of support for the issue, showing them the diversity of groups involved in the campaign.

- To be successful the forum needs to have a large turnout. Weeks prior to the event, start mailings and a phone bank to get all of the supporting organizations to attend and bring a crowd.

Rally

A rally is an excellent tool for bringing together the constituency you have built, for helping them feel part of a larger movement, and to get them excited about all of the work they need to do during the campaign.

Have each of the groups carry placards or banners to be visible; invite public officials and high-profile speakers.

Working with the Media: Getting “Ink”

Getting media attention—whether it’s a spot on the local news or an article in your neighborhood paper—can bring a powerful boost to your campaign. Media attention toward your issue will not only educate and influence elected officials and the general public, but will also build name recognition for and lend credibility to your campaign or group.

Getting Media Coverage

Develop a Media Plan

- Outline which media outlets you want to target (local vs. city/countywide media, print vs. television or radio) and how you are going to target them (press conferences, opinion pieces, radio, and so forth). For example, your group might decide to write a series of opinion columns for local newspapers, or you might issue press releases to local cable channels.

Seek Ready-Made Press

- Always be armed with a sound bite about your campaign.
- Be ready to respond and react to any press about the campaign or your issue with opinion editorials (op-eds) and letters to the editor (LTEs).

Be Opportunistic

- Look for opportunities to get media attention everywhere.
- Hold up your banner at parades.
- Hand out stickers and pins at other groups’ events.

Build Relationships

- Get to know the different reporters and how they work. Who covers local politics? Environmental issues? Notice whether they write long, in-depth features or punchy, newsy shorter pieces.
- Make their jobs easier by giving them information at times and in formats that are easy for them to use.

Hold Some Press Events on Weekends.

- Sundays are slow news days and local press events help to engage community groups.

Target Unlikely Suspects

- Don't just focus on environmental or parks reporters; try to integrate your issue into other hot-button issues, such as education, crime, and health.
- Reach out to reporters who cover these issues, tailoring your message to each.
- Pitch your story to magazines, TV, and radio stations as well as newspapers.

Be Creative

- Diversify your story angles.
- For example, don't just pitch short expose pieces on individual parks or issues; instead, try to work with a reporter on a long, thought-provoking piece or human-interest story.

Standard Media Tools

Press Events

(See "Press Events and Press Conferences on p. 32 for more information.)

- Holding regular press events is essential in keeping your issue visible and in the news.
- Good media events include rallies, press conferences, kick-off events, and speeches.
- All are great opportunities to publicly introduce endorsing groups and VIPs and to demonstrate compelling visuals to the press.

Press Conferences

- A particularly effective media event, because they allow you to control the way your campaign is portrayed.
- At a press conference you can present your story directly to the media and announce something special or newsworthy, such as a campaign kick-off, an important event, or a problem affecting people in the community.

Press Advisories and Releases

(For more detailed information, see instructions on writing advisories and releases beginning on p. 35.)

Press Advisories

- Inform reporters ahead of time about an event or press conference that you would like them to attend.
- A news advisory tells the Who, What, When, Where and Why of the story—without revealing so much so that reporters don't need to come to the event!
- Should be sent to the press at least three days in advance and then again on the day of the event, and should always be accompanied by a personal phone call to the reporter.

Press Releases

- Simply announce newsworthy events to the press.
- Usually handed out at press conferences, or sent to the media shortly after an event.
- Designed to answer a reporter's questions before they are asked and allow you to frame your issue the way you want.
- A good press release should do a reporter's job, writing the story for them—and indeed, many press releases are printed verbatim, particularly in smaller papers.
- As with a news advisory, a press release should always be accompanied by a follow-up phone call.

Letters to the Editor (LTEs) and Op-Eds

- The opinion section is one of the most highly read sections of the newspaper, and one of the easiest places to get pieces printed. Use this to your advantage with LTEs and op-eds.
- **LTEs** are easy to write and get published. LTE's are statements of opinion, and unlike most newspaper articles, can be very slanted towards a particular viewpoint. LTEs can be used to correct misleading facts of statements, argue for or against a certain issue, or announce a campaign or organization. For example, you can write a letter responding to a previous article or simply just stating your opinion on an issue.
- **Opinion Editorials (Op-Eds)** are longer editorial pieces that are usually written by a prominent person or the editorial board staff. The average length is about 500 words. Op-Eds go into more detail than LTEs and much harder to get published.

Other Media Tools

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

- A PSA is usually a free 10–20 second spot on a radio or TV program, or small announcement or ad in a newspaper about your organization and what you are trying to accomplish. You can use PSAs to announce an event or meeting, or simply to publicize your campaign. Most radio, TV, and print media offer a certain amount of free space for these—all you need to do is call and ask.

Radio Feed

- A shortened version of a news release put into a 15–20 second sound bite to broadcast on the radio. You can either record the sound bite yourself or fax the radio station a script. Radio stations will also send reporters to cover events occasionally. Target radio stations that have talk shows or news programs.

Editorial Board Meeting

- Meeting with the editorial board of a newspaper is useful to brief them on your issue and build relationships with them. If the editorial board is impressed with your campaign or issue they may choose to write an op-ed or more in-depth opinion piece on it.

Paid Advertisements

- If you have the funding, paid advertisements for your organization or campaign are certain to get your message out. You can take out an advertisement in the local newspaper, create a poster to be put in busses, or create a commercial for television.

Community Calendars

- Most newspapers have a community calendar or event section where you can list public events for FREE. Each newspaper has different deadlines on when to submit an event for publication—call ahead to find out.

Press Events and Press Conferences

Yes, you, too can put on a press conference, complete with speakers, cameras, and all the trimmings. Press conferences are not just for public officials; they can be an effective and powerful way to communicate a message. Remember that press conferences are visual events. If you are making an announcement or calling attention to an issue without a “visual,” such as compelling speakers or crowds, then you may want to consider writing a press release rather than devoting time to putting together a press conference.

General Press Conference Logistics

The entire press conference should last no longer than 30 minutes and should follow a format similar to the following:

1. **Introduce Speakers and Agenda** – 3 minutes
2. **Speaker 1** (e.g., elected official) – 3 minutes
3. **Speaker 2** (e.g., local youth) – 3 minutes
4. **Speaker 3** (e.g., president or spokesperson of organization) – 3 minutes
5. **Question and Answer** (Make sure this section is moderated by someone who can answer difficult questions and direct media questions to the right person.)

Putting Together a Press Conference

1. Pick an Accessible Location and a Convenient Time
 - The availability of local media varies. Generally, most reporters have afternoon deadlines, so it is best to do press conferences in the morning.
 - Be sure to choose a location that is easy to get to and highlights the topic you are addressing, such as your local park. (Make sure to get all the necessary permits beforehand.)
2. Invite Speakers
 - Aim to have around three speakers—you don’t want the press conference to run too long.
 - When choosing speakers, make sure they reflect your issue, represent different constituencies, and are visuals themselves.
 - For example, if you are organizing a press conference around a clean-up event in your park, speakers you may want to consider are: elected officials, the president of your organization, important community members, an impassioned volunteer or local children who use the park.
3. Contact the Media Well in Advance
 - As a general rule, send out (fax if possible) your Media Advisory at least four days in advance; however, this may vary depending on the media outlet and their specific printing deadlines. (*See tips on writing a press advisory and release on page 33.*)
 - Practice your pitch to the press and follow up the fax with personal phone calls to reporters and editors.

- Try to get specific commitments from reporters that they will show up on the day of the event.
4. Make Reminder Calls
 - Call reporters the day before or the morning of the event to confirm their attendance.
 5. Prep Speakers
 - Remind your speakers of the key “talking points” you hope they will cover.
 - Ask them to keep their presentations brief.
 - Each speaker should talk for no more than 3 minutes.
 6. Have Visuals
 - Put your logo on the podium and have large banners and crowds behind the speakers.
 7. Create a Press Sign-in Area and Press Kits.
 - Sign in reporters and hand out press kits at the beginning of the press conference.
 - **Press kits** should include a copy of the **press release** (*see p. 35*) with quotes from speakers, copies of each of the speakers’ statements and bios, and any other pertinent information on the topic.
 8. Follow up with the Media
 - Make follow-up calls and fax press releases and pictures from the event to reporters who did not attend.
 - Just because a journalist doesn’t attend your press conference, doesn’t mean that he won’t write a story on it.
 - It’s also a good idea to check in with reporters who did attend the press conference to ask if they need more information, and to find out if they are running the story.
 9. Track Coverage
 - Clip all articles and record any live coverage on television or radio.
 - Use copies of articles to promote your organization to the community, elected officials or funders.

Getting Noticed: Writing Press Releases and Advisories

As an organization seeking media coverage, you are competing with the many other news advisories and releases coming across the editor’s desk at a newspaper every day. The paper has a limited amount of time and space to cover these issues. What makes yours special? What would make the paper want to cover your story over someone else’s?

Terms

- **Press Advisory:** used to announce an upcoming event.
- **Press Release:** used to report on an issue or event, usually after it has happened.

Simple Rules for Getting Noticed

1. Be Compelling
 - Your press release is competing with many others in the newsroom—you need to have a hard news hook.
 - Releases with breaking news, or those with a local angle, are more likely to get covered.
 - Ask yourself: What makes my issue special and unique? What makes my issue urgent and important? Highlight these points in the release.
2. Neatness Counts
 - If your release is sloppy with many errors, your organization appears unprofessional.
 - Always print your release or advisory on organization letterhead to show your legitimacy.
 - Reporters are busy people and won’t waste their time covering events of groups that they don’t take seriously.
3. Phone It In
 - After you fax in your advisory or release **always** follow up with a personal phone call to the specific reporter you hope will cover the story.
 - Ask the reporter if she received the release/ advisory and then quickly pitch your story (summarizing the release). Ask if she has any questions and if she will be covering the story.
 - Be brief; reporters are busy people and are usually under deadline in the afternoon.

4. Persistence Counts

- If a reporter doesn't show up for your press conference don't take it personally. Time conflicts happen, but it doesn't mean your story still can't get printed.
- Fax media outlets a copy of your press release and pictures from the event as soon as it is over. Then follow up with another phone call to see if they got the release or have any questions.

Writing a Great News Release

1. Use the Inverted Pyramid

- Put the most important and substantive information first and the least important information last. (*See example on p. 35.*)

2. Be Accurate

- Quotes and numbers from your press release are often re-printed in articles, so make sure your facts are correct and that you have permission to quote people.
- Be honest and don't inflate details—you will lose credibility if you do.

3. Be Personal

- Quotes help to personalize and add validity to your issue. Try to include quotes from at least two different individuals.
- When using quotes, always include the title of the person you are writing about.

Letters to the Editor (LTEs)

Letters to the Editor (LTEs) are one of the most important tools for any communication plan and a great way to broadcast your organization's message. The opinion section of the newspaper is often the most highly read. Submitting an LTE is a great way to get the attention of your policy makers and to educate the general public. LTEs are simple to write, and best of all they offer free publicity!

How Can We Use a Letter to the Editor?

Letters to the editor can be used to respond to an article or opinion, or event you support or oppose, correct misleading facts, or simply be a statement of your opinion on an issue. For example, if you are upset with your elected official's views on a particular issue affecting your group, write a LTE to your local newspaper about it.

A few tips for successful LTE-writing:

Keep It Short and Simple

Your point will get lost if your message isn't straightforward and clear. LTEs are generally under 250 words. Check the guidelines for your local newspaper—each has different restrictions. Stick to one subject in your letter.

Be Specific and Timely

- If you are responding to an article or debate, make sure you submit it ASAP, or else its relevance will be diminished.
- Make sure to identify the name and date of the article you are responding to, and to outline the particular issue you are covering.

Name Names

- Name specific elected officials involved in the issue—it will get their attention. If an elected official's name is in the paper, they will hear about it and they will listen.
- Make sure to name your organization if you are active in the issue; it's a great way to get more publicity.

Call for Action

- Use an LTE to encourage readers to take a particular, specific action, such as contacting their elected officials, coming to a meeting or rally, or getting involved in a certain organization.

Be Accurate

- Back up your arguments with accurate facts and figures. Use your credentials to establish credibility.

Be Engaging

- Don't be afraid to be blunt in your letter and make sure to have an eye-catching title. Newspapers love controversy.
- Your LTE has a greater chance of being published if it is engaging and evokes a reaction from the reader.

Be Local

- Give your LTE a local spin and tie it into local sites, issues or personalities. Newspapers are more likely to print it if it is relevant to the community they serve.
- For example, if you are writing about a global issue such loss of natural areas, remember to tie it into local politics and include how it is directly affecting your neighborhood.

PRESS RELEASE OUTLINE

Organization Name/Logo

Organization address
and phone number

PRESS RELEASE**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Date of release

Attention: Name of Editor or Reporter

For More Information:

Name of contact person

Phone number

Catchy Headline:

(A quick line that explains what's going on—should be both attention-grabbing and informative)

Title

(Another sentence giving a bit more information)

{First Paragraph}

- 2-3 sentences long
- Covers the five W's—**WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE AND WHY**
- The most important information should come first – you want to grab the reporter's attention.

{Middle Paragraphs}

- If possible, include at least two quotes
- Imitate the “inverted pyramid” style of newspaper articles and put the most important information first.
- Each following paragraph should contain decreasingly important/vital information.

{Closing Paragraph}

- State the purpose of your group or campaign, when it was started, and notable things that you have done.

-###-

(Use this to mark the end of the release so reporters do not expect additional pages)

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Friends of Lakeside Park

111 Lakeside Road
New York, NY 10011
212-555-1111, 212-555-2222 (f)

PRESS RELEASE**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

May 16, 2008

Attention: Jane Smith, Editor

For More Information:

Marsha Smith, President

Phone: 212-555-1111

Local Residents Take Back the Park

FRIENDS OF LAKESIDE PARK HOST CLEAN UP
AS PART OF CITYWIDE "IT'S MY PARK DAY"

More than 40 dedicated local Lakeside residents, including a group of 5th grade students from P.S. 001, showed up at Lakeside Park on Saturday, May 16 to give something back to the community. The group, organized by Friends of Lakeside Park, spent hours repainting the park house, planting over 2,000 daffodil bulbs and removing over 20 bags of litter from the park. The Friends of Lakeside Park's clean up was part of "It's My Park Day," a day of clean-up activities taking place across New York City.

Munching on a free bagel donated by Bob's Bagels and sporting an "It's My Park" T-shirt, Lakeside resident Joe Jones explained why he was there, "I live just around the corner," he said, "Without this park my kids would have nowhere to play. This is our park and we need to take care of it."

Friends of Lakeside Park President, Marsha Smith, declared the event a huge success. "This is our biggest clean up ever," she said. "We're really excited to see so many people working to improve our park and community. Also, it's great to know that we are part of thousands of New Yorkers cleaning up their local parks today." Known as "It's My Park Day" and run by Partnerships for Parks, a joint program of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation and City Parks Foundation, the day includes events sponsored by hundreds of community groups. Together, they immeasurably improve the quality of life in New York's many diverse neighborhoods.

The Friends of Lakeside Park is a non-profit community group, founded in 1984, dedicated to taking care of the park. The group cleans the park every two weeks during the warmer months and hosts a summer concert series. The group always welcomes new members. To get involved call Jane Smith, Membership Coordinator, at (212) 555-3333.

-###-

PRESS ADVISORY OUTLINE

Organization Name/Logo

Organization address
and phone number

Press Advisory

Date of advisory

For More Information:

Name of contact person
Phone number of contact

Catchy Headline:

(A quick line that explains what's going on—should be both attention-grabbing and informative)

Title

(Another sentence giving a bit more information)

A description of the event comes here—a brief synopsis of the WHAT and WHY. This should be about one paragraph long (the entire advisory should be no longer than one page). Be clear about what reporters can expect to take place at the event, but do not give too much information or else the reporters will not need to attend—they will already have the story.

WHO: List speakers at the event or who is sponsoring it (always include titles)

WHEN: Date and Time

WHERE: Location of event—be specific and give good directions, you want reporters to be able to find it!

VISUALS: List here any photo opportunities, including creative costumes, backdrops or props.

-###-

(Use this to mark the end of the release so reporters do not expect additional pages)

Include Your Contact Information

- Most newspapers require that you include your full name, address, day and evening phone number, and email address (if applicable).
- Papers will usually call you before they publish your letter to verify that you are the author and live in the area.

Target Multiple Newspapers

- Have different members of your group each send a LTE to a different newspaper. Make sure the text in each letter is different, but the message the same.
- Having multiple letters about a particular issue appear in the media at the same time will show that the issue has a lot of diverse support from the community.

Be Persistent

- If your letter doesn't get published the first time around, try, try again.
- Try modifying the angle of the story while keeping the same underlying message, or submitting it to different papers.

B. USING TECHNOLOGY TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Email Alerts and LISTSERVs™

Email alerts are a “quick and dirty” way to communicate with your group's membership. LISTSERVs™, or electronic discussion lists, are simple and free to set up, and can be much easier to manage than an email list, particularly when your group gets large. Use email alerts and LISTSERVs™ to announce meetings and rallies, send out action alerts, or even to seek information from other group members.

Most LISTSERVs™ give you the option of receiving messages in two different formats: regular or digest. With a digest format you receive all messages posted to the LISTERV™ in the form of one condensed document per day, whereas with the regular format you receive messages as they are sent from each individual member.

Email Alerts

(Adapted from TechRocks, “Writing Effective Email Alerts,” www.techrocks.org.) An email action alert is simply a call to action—an attempt to get people to do something such as

call their local elected official or come to a rally or event. Email Action Alerts serve as a quick and easy way to invite people to get involved in their community or political process. You can reach hundreds of people with the click of a mouse and facilitate quick and easy exchanges of information. For example, including an action item in a LISTSERV™ or on your website is a great way to remind your constituents that they can effect change.

Writing Good Action Alerts:

1. **Use a catchy subject line.** You only get one chance to make a good first impression. If you have a catchy subject line people are more inclined to read what you have to say.
2. **Keep it simple yet informative.** Speak in a conversational tone and keep it short. Get to the point right away. Ask for one clear action. If you try to include too much, the impact of your message will get lost.
3. **Don't hide your alert in a newsletter.** The e-newsletter format is not necessarily the most effective format for generating political action—your alert can be overshadowed by the other information in the newsletter. When it is critical that your constituents respond to your action item, send a separate email action alert with just one clear call to action.
4. **Back up your issue.** Make sure to give just enough background information and facts to give the issue some validity without bogging down the document with data. Include links to other websites with more information.
5. **Empower your audience.** Let recipients know that their action will actually make a difference and thank them when they take action. For example, send a thank you email to all those who took part in an action; let each person know the elected official's response to the multitude of emails he received on the issue.
6. **Personalize the issue.** Connect your alert to the recipients' lives and let them know how your issue affects their families and their communities.
7. **Make it urgent.** Stress the urgency of the alert. Make it clear why you are sending the alert today instead of three weeks from now or next year.
8. **Date it.** Always include a date on your messages—emails can get forwarded around a lot and for long periods of time so it is important to show that your alert is current.

9. **Always sign your messages.** You gain credibility when people know who you are, what group you are from, and how to contact you.
10. **Remember the domino theory.** Encourage recipients of the alert to forward the email. Think of the number of people you could reach if each person on your email list forwarded your action alert to at least one other person and so on and so on.
11. **Privacy is key.** When sending emails from an email account instead of a LISTSERV, use the “Bcc” field, which stands for blind carbon copy. This field hides the individual email addresses so they are not displayed to everyone who gets the email. In addition, recipients of the email cannot reply back to the entire list.

LISTSERVs

There are several different types of LISTSERVs:

1. **Moderated.** You (or a moderator you designate) approve each message before it is posted to the list. This option allows you to weed out messages that are not appropriate.
2. **Un-Moderated/Open Discussion.** Subscribers can post freely.
3. **E-Newsletter.** Only the list owner can post to a newsletter or announcement list; messages from subscribers do not appear on the list.

Setting up a LISTSERV:

Option 1: Use an online LISTSERV service. These services are usually free and offer you many different options in the design and maintenance of your LISTSERV. Bear in mind, though, that the company will usually have ads on the emails sent out. Google provides a free electronic discussion service, Google Groups, which can be accessed by going to www.googlegroups.com.

Option 2: Join a pre-existing LISTSERV. There are plenty of pre-existing, park-related online discussions that allow you to post relevant information. Joining a pre-existing LISTSERV may be more suitable for small park groups because there is already an existing audience.

Option 3: Purchase specific electronic discussion software that can be installed and managed from your computer. This option is a bit more expensive but allows you the most control. However, you should be comfortable managing the tech problems that may arise to use this option.

Etiquette Tips for Writing to a LISTSERV

1. Keep your messages relevant to the topic and membership of the list.
2. If you have a comment or message directed at one specific person, do not send it to the entire list of subscribers, but to him or her directly.
3. Remember that emails are not confidential or private, and can be forwarded on to hundreds of people.
4. Be polite and respectful of the other views that get posted on the LISTSERV.
5. Always sign your message.

Databases

Databases can help you to manage your mailing lists and organize your mailings more efficiently.

Organizations with more than 100 names on their mailing list or that track detailed information about their supporters are good candidates for a database. Databases can be as simple as names and addresses listed in a spreadsheet document such as in Excel, or as complicated as having your own personally designed program. **If you do not have much experience with databases you should definitely consider hiring a consultant to help you to decide on and design an appropriate database application.**

Databases Can Help You

1. Manage your mailing lists by:
 - Streamlining your mailings by automatically printing labels or printing right onto postcards or envelopes;
 - Targeting your mailings by issue, demographics, electoral districts, counties, zip codes, previous actions taken, or desired frequency of receiving alerts; and
 - Breaking up your longer lists into sub-groups for easy management.
2. Track activities for funders or internal management
 - Document the number and types of events you do.
 - Track expenses, volunteer activities, and history of participation for volunteers.

Choosing and Developing a Database

What Do You Need from a Database?

A good rule of thumb when deciding on a database is simpler=cheaper; more complex=more expensive.

If you have simple needs such as mailing labels or simple sorting abilities you can use a spreadsheet like Excel (comes standard with Microsoft Office). Spreadsheets can organize your data by field (such as first name, last name, street address, state, zip, and phone) and sort your data by these fields (alphabetically by last name or by zip). By combining your data with the mail-merge program in applications like Microsoft Word, you can easily create mailing labels.

Spreadsheets are only practical if you are storing small amounts of information per person such as their phone number and address. There are also simple database programs such as My Mail List or MS Outlook that are easy to use with small mailing lists.

If you have more complex database needs, such as storing a lot of information per person, more elaborate sorting abilities, or running reports, you may need to get a specialized database program.

Database Software

You have two options when choosing a database application:

1. Pre-Fabricated

- Download cheap or free software from the Internet. There are many simple programs available.
- Purchase a pre-made software package. Pre-made database applications are well thought out and “debugged,” but often cannot be customized to fit your unique needs. However, there are some programs, such as Microsoft Access, that can be customized.

2. Custom

You can hire a consultant to make a custom database designed specifically for your group’s needs. Consultants can be expensive, but can help you to map out your technology needs, current technology infrastructure and capacity, and help you to make the best use of the latest technology. Consultants can provide you with one-on-one assistance to develop technology that best suits your

organization’s goals and budget. They can provide custom databases, websites and other programs, technology planning and upgrading, suggestions on buying appropriate hardware and software, and general technology problem solving. You can find sources for consultants for non-profits at:

- TechSoup (www.techsoup.org)
- NPower (www.npower.org)

Websites

Developing a Website

If your website needs are relatively simple, you can design and build your own website even without much computer experience.

Tap into the resources of your group to create a website— is someone a computer programmer? Graphic designer? Photographer?

Getting the Most Out of Your Website

1. Educate the Public

Websites allow you to post information and facts about your organization or issue. Features such as an events calendar and news bulletins help to educate and involve the public. You can design your website so that visitors can download or print out materials your group produces, such as fact sheets or environmental education materials.

2. Make it Compelling

Use compelling text and pictures on your site. Keep your website easy to read and to navigate. If your site is too cluttered the message will get lost.

3. Don’t Repeat What Has Already Been Done

Rather than re-writing already published information, create links on your site to relevant pages or documents on other group’s sites. This not only keeps your site simpler and less cluttered, but also encourages communication and networking between groups.

4. Market Your Site

Be sure to advertise your site in all of your publications. Materials you hand out to the public will lead people to areas on your site where they can get more information, send email to officials, and otherwise engage with your group. Exchange links with other groups to increase publicity further.

5. Take Action

Websites are important advocacy tools and are a great way to get people involved in your campaign. They make it easy to take action. For example, some sites allow you to email a letter to your elected officials or automatically send a fax to the President. For less elaborate sites, you can just post information on how to contact your elected officials and talking points on what to say to them.

6. Conduct Constant Outreach

Just by including your organization's contact information and ways for people to get involved (coming to an event or meeting, taking action) on your website, you are doing outreach. There is also technology that you can include on your website that allows volunteers to sign up directly online. You can even design your website to capture the contact information of anyone who takes action on your site, thereby increasing the size of your database/ mailing list.

7. Use Social Media

Whether your park support group is established or just getting started, using a variety of social media tools in conjunction with your website can help get your message across. From photo sharing to blogging, these tools can generate awareness of and engagement in your issues.

One of the best non-profit social media resources is Beth's Blog: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media which links to the WeAreMedia Nonprofit Social Media Toolbox.

Other popular social media applications that can interface with your website include:

- Flickr, a photo sharing site;
- Facebook, a free-access social networking website; and
- Youtube, a social networking and video sharing site.

Reaching out to new members is an ongoing task for groups working in parks. In the past, groups have often found themselves relying solely on a few well-worn methods of outreach, putting up flyers on the same telephone poles, or calling the same lists of people. With the advent of new social media tools, tasks can be done at minimal cost and make a big impact. In the next section you'll find a resource sheet outlining the pros and cons of both traditional approaches and newer social media technology resources designed to reach out to new members of your community.

C. EFFECTIVE OUTREACH STRATEGIES

“How To” Tips and Effective Outreach Tools

1. Set realistic goals for how many people you want to reach and assess the amount of resources your group has to conduct the outreach.
2. Remember the 10% rule of thumb—however much outreach you do, expect a 10% return (for example, if you want 200 people to attend a concert then you should expect to reach out to about 2000 people).
3. Assign tasks to appropriate people.
4. Do not be discouraged by “no”—try to figure out how to tailor your requests and pitches to your target audience.
5. Always follow up and follow through.
6. Use visuals (flyers, postcards, and banners) that are clear, concise, and contain your group's name, contact information, date, time, and place of the event. Put the most important information at the top or in the largest font but avoid visual clutter.
7. Be sensitive to deadlines for press releases and advances, web postings, and PSAs.
8. Be respectful of appropriate places to put your flyers, banners, and posters.
9. Be respectful of the neighborhood and community.
10. Create a timeline to allow enough time for all tasks to be completed.

Effective Outreach Tools

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Ads in local papers | • Announcement (PSA) |
| • Banners | • Canvassing |
| • Brochures | • News conferences |
| • Bulletin boards | • Posters and Flyers |
| • Mailing lists | • Calendars |
| • Newsletters and publications | • Phone bank/Cold calling |
| • Tabling | • Sign-in Sheets |
| • House parties | • Community presentations |
| • Letter to the Editor/Op-Ed | • One-on-one/Networking |
| • Email blasts | • List-serves/Website postings |
| • Blogs | • Electronic photo sharing |
| • Social Networking Sites | |
| • Public Service | |

Using Outreach Tools: A Resource Sheet

Outreach Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages	Best Practices
Bulletin Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can install by an entrance or other high visibility area in a park Can repeatedly post flyers and calendars Can post on other bulletin boards at high traffic areas Great for promoting a specific event or meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually need funds to purchase them (price range \$200-500) Group usually responsible for maintenance if they do purchase them (must remove graffiti, deal with other vandalism) If bulletin board doesn't belong to the group—must re-post flyers and other materials often since other people will post their info as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post and repost your information so that it's always prominent on the bulletin Install the bulletin board in a high traffic/highly visible areas in your park Supplemental—used best in conjunction with other forms of outreach
Phone Bank/Cold Calling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can reach many people/institutions in a relatively short period of time Can generate list of individuals/institutions interested in supporting your group Can be a first step in establishing a relationship with potential partners Allows for interaction Phone banking is a great bonding experience for members/volunteers Can create a “phone tree” for those people who cannot come together to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes research to generate initial contact list if you don't have one There's a higher percentage of “No's” to “Yes” If you don't create your own, you might have to pay for an initial list People need training and good communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be enthusiastic on the phone Start early, a few weeks before the activity Don't forget the follow up a few days before the activity Take shifts and break up the number of phone calls to manageable bits Plan to phone bank for an hour or two Write a strong phone “rap” Provide encouragement to callers Keep list “warm”
Canvassing (going door to door)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can reach individuals/residents who might not get reached by other outreach methods Effective way to identify a community issue or people's interest in your issue Can have focused one on one conversations with neighbors about your issue/mission Gets people familiar with the community by walking around in it It's a great bonding experience for members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canvassing is time consuming—must set aside time for walking around neighborhood and explaining your issue to each person you talk to. People may not want to talk to you—there's a higher percentage of “No's” to “Yes”. Be aware of safety issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a 1–2 minute “talk” about your issue Go with a buddy—it's fun and safer Break target neighborhood into manageable sections—spend about 1–3 hours on the canvass Start canvassing your neighborhood at least a month before your activity

Using Outreach Tools: A Resource Sheet—Continued

Outreach Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages	Best Practices
News Conferences and Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds relationships with local media—makes them more likely to cover future events High visibility for events/high profile meetings It's free exposure Huge audience 	Media might not pick up the story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send press advisories or releases to local media a few days before the event Call media to follow up the day before to get confirmation on their attendance Call media after event (they might want a story even if they don't show up) Collect articles if the story is printed (they make great supplementary information when you fundraise)
Posters and Flyers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High, constant visibility Can be relatively cheap outreach materials Can be easy to produce by the group Handing out flyers (leafleting/flyering) gives you a chance to interact with community people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No way of knowing who is interested unless they contact you or show up—no good way of doing follow up Get ripped down or posted over often, esp. in high visibility areas Subject to weather degradation so they don't last long If you post flyers or posters in an illegal place you can get fined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start posting flyers and posters about 4–6 weeks before your activity Escalate flyering and/or postering—post a few and then post more as the date of activity gets closer Remember the 10% rule of thumb—however many flyers/posters you put up expect to get 10% of that number to attend—you must usually do more outreach than the expected number of people to attend
Public Service Announcement (PSA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High, constant visibility Can reach non local people Most often it's free exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No way of knowing who you are reaching unless they identify themselves to you Takes time to create your PSA Very few details are in a PSA—you have to convey lots of information in a very short time period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use PSAs as a supplement to other forms of outreach—should not be used on its own Broadcast a week or two (at the most before your event) Use for publicizing large events (concerts, festivals, etc.) Know the editorial board's deadlines
Letter to the Editor/Op-Ed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Op-ed pages are one of most widely read sections of the paper It's a forum to explain in detail your mission/issue & introduce your group to a large audience It's free exposure 	Paper might not publish your Letter to the Editor or write an op-ed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know the editorial board's deadlines If there is an issue/article in the paper that's related to what your group is doing, try to link that with your LTE—it's more likely to be published. If your letter gets printed have some members or volunteers write additional letters responding to the initial letter (it's like a hard copy high visibility message board)
House Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good way for group members to socialize Good way for new members and old members to socialize 	House parties are more social—not usually the best event to host if you want to do lots of work	Hold house party after a particularly demanding project (chance to unwind and have fun together)

Using Outreach Tools: A Resource Sheet—Continued

Outreach Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages	Best Practices
Community Presentations	<p>Good opportunity to explain your group's goals/mission to a captive audience</p> <p>Gives your group's representatives a chance to get acquainted with consistently active community members</p> <p>Good recruitment ground</p>	<p>Could be time consuming</p> <p>Your issue is one of many</p>	<p>Leave time for a question/answer session</p> <p>Be aware of meeting schedules</p> <p>Bring materials (flyers, calendars)</p> <p>Be aware of paper's deadlines</p>
Ads in Local Papers	<p>High, constant visibility</p> <p>Reach broad constituency of local community</p> <p>Builds relationship with local media</p>	<p>There's usually a fee</p> <p>No way of knowing who you are reaching unless they identify themselves to you</p>	<p>Be aware of paper's deadlines.</p> <p>Place ad a week or two before activity</p> <p>Ad should be clear and concise</p>
Banners	<p>High on site visibility</p> <p>Can advertise the group and/or group's activities</p>	<p>Could be expensive</p> <p>No way of knowing who you are reaching unless they come your event or call you</p>	<p>Install a banner a week or two before the event near the location of the event</p> <p>Make sure banner is visible on the day of your event</p> <p>Banner should have contact info in addition to date/time/place information</p>
Tabling	<p>Gets community familiar with your group</p> <p>Good place to use sign-in sheets to generate contact list</p> <p>Can share information about your group (calendars, brochures) in a public space</p> <p>You can meet regular park/green space users and discover what their concerns are</p> <p>Is a mobile office for your group</p>	<p>Getting the supplies and then bringing them to the site of the tabling</p> <p>Can't always table everywhere—sometimes you need permission</p> <p>Get more "no's" to "yes"—not everyone will stop at your table</p>	<p>Set up near high traffic area or near group's activities</p> <p>Have lots of information ready to hand out</p> <p>If you are tabling as part of some general outreach plan—try and table in the same spot so people will begin to recognize you</p> <p>Have one person sit at table and then have other volunteers float around the table</p> <p>Post materials that identify the group (banners)</p>

Using Outreach Tools: A Resource Sheet—Continued

Outreach Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages	Best Practices
Sign-in Sheets	<p>Generates contact list</p> <p>Find out which outreach methods have been the most successful for your group</p>	<p>Easy to forget to use</p>	<p>Put out a sign in sheet at all your events, meetings, projects. This is your list of interested individuals</p> <p>Remember to include space for all the ways people can be contacted (email, mailing address, phone #s etc.)</p> <p>On the sign in sheet – if possible add space for people’s interests and how they found out about the group (this is a good way to track which outreach methods were successful)</p> <p>Don’t just throw it in a corner; do follow up</p>
Newsletters, Brochures, and Pamphlets	<p>Informs community about your mission/goals/projects</p>	<p>Costs money and can take lots of time to produce</p>	<p>Always have at events and tabling</p>
Calendar	<p>Informs community about upcoming events, meetings, projects well in advance</p>	<p>Costs money and can take lots of time to produce</p>	<p>Always have at events and tabling</p>
One-on-One Networking	<p>High quality</p> <p>Engaging</p> <p>Allows for greatest amount of info/ feedback to be exchanged</p>	<p>Time consuming—you do not reach a lot of people</p>	<p>Use as often as possible.</p> <p>Every encounter becomes an outreach opportunity</p>
Email Blasts and Mailing Lists	<p>Reach large numbers of people at one time</p> <p>Can attach flyers to email blasts</p>	<p>People rarely respond back to you from email blasts—you may need additional one on one follow up</p> <p>Difficult to do if you don’t already have an established contact list</p> <p>Mailing lists are time intensive</p> <p>Mailing lists cost money (you might have to pay for postage)</p> <p>Mailing lists also need additional one on one follow up</p>	<p>Start sending out email blasts about a month before your event or meeting.</p> <p>Since regular mail takes time to get to people, send out mailing 4–6 weeks before your event</p> <p>Follow up in both cases to confirm if people received the information</p> <p>Do another email blast day before the event</p>

Using Outreach Tools: A Resource Sheet—Continued

Outreach Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages	Best Practices
LISTSERVs and Website posting	<p>Ability to communicate with large number of people at the same time</p> <p>LISTSERVs and websites can target specific interests and tap into a ready made population of potential supporters</p>	<p>Follow up can be difficult with website postings</p>	<p>You can either start a LISTSERV for your group or join one</p> <p>If you want to post for your event follow the suggestions for flyers and posting</p>
Blogs	<p>You can go in depth about pressing issues and events</p> <p>Informs the public about your group and community concerns</p> <p>The public can often respond to postings and engage</p>	<p>Can be time consuming</p>	<p>Find good writers who are passionate about the issues and events your group hosts</p> <p>Can be used before, during and after an event</p>
Electronic Photo Sharing (Ex. Flickr)	<p>You have the ability to show up to date photos of important work your group is doing</p> <p>A good way to engage your supporters because anyone can contribute</p> <p>It can be done for little or no cost</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Make sure you have at least one photographer assigned to your events</p> <p>Communicate to members that you're looking for photos of events and give them information on how to post them</p>
Social Networking Sites (Ex. Facebook)	<p>Build awareness and name recognition of your organization or issue.</p> <p>Ability to easily share information with friends</p> <p>Information can spread virally</p>	<p>Hasn't been proven to be a good fundraising mechanism</p> <p>Maintaining social networking sites can be time consuming</p>	<p>Keep information up to date</p>

Building a Constituency: Growing and Using a Mailing List

Why Do We Need a Mailing List?

- **A good mailing list reflects the strength of your organization.** If you can keep track of the people you contact and increase the number of people you reach, you can demonstrate that your group represents an ever-increasing number of people.
- **A large mailing list means more helping hands.** Not everyone you contact will get involved with your projects, but the more names you have, the better chance you have to get some help.
- **A large mailing list can help to raise consciousness about your group.** The more often you send people notices, the more often they will think about you.

Building Your Mailing List

- **Use events to build your list.** All events are chances to build membership. Be sure to have a table at every event with some sort of sign or logo present identifying your group. Make sure everyone signs your sign-in sheets when they arrive. This not only provides you with a record of who came, but also gives you important contact information for the future.
- **Trade lists with other groups.** Some of your group's current members may belong to groups that have larger databases. These groups may be willing to help you out by contributing parts of their list. To add these names to your own mailing list, send out a letter to the other group's mailing list that includes a self addressed envelope. Ask people to send their information back to you, letting you know if you have permission to keep their address on your list.
- **Make sure your information is current.** Once you start to accumulate names, you should be sure to keep your list up to date. Sending materials to out-of-date addresses only wastes time and money. A database should be constantly edited for changes in contact information.
- **Keep track of database numbers.** You can use the increasing size of your database as leverage for your group. If you are applying for grants or approaching elected officials for support, it can be particularly helpful to show how numbers have been increasing to reflect the growth of your organization.

Buying a Mailing List

Why Buy?

- Your group feels it has exhausted its current mailing list and wants to reach out to new people.
- Your group is planning a big event and you want to invite many more people than are on your group's mailing list.

What Kind of List?

- **One-Time Use.** Less expensive, but can only be used once. A mailing list company will provide you with a list of names, with the condition that you will only use these names or labels once. Often, companies will check up on clients by inserting a "dummy" address somewhere in the list that gets sent to someone in the company. That way, they can be sure that you don't use the list more than once.
- **Multiple-Use.** More expensive, but can be used numerous times. If you are planning on using the list more than four times within a year, it may be worthwhile to buy the multiple-use list. However, you should remember that people's contact information changes frequently, and in order to insure accuracy you need updated information.

What Form?

- Mailing list companies can organize their data in multiple ways. Often groups target particular zip codes, but you can also target income levels or other categories.
- The data itself comes electronically, and is compatible with most spreadsheet and database software (check with the company to be sure).
- You can also order pre-printed address labels, but this can add to the cost.

Putting Out Your Mailing

Sending out thousands of pieces of mail is a huge undertaking. Here are some tips for making the process cost-effective and time-efficient:

Have a Mailing Party

One of the cheapest and most enjoyable ways to get a big mailing done is to have a mailing party. Get a local businessperson to donate food and drink and hold the party at a member's home or public space. With a large group helping, even a large mailing won't take very much time.

To Bulk Mail or Not to Bulk Mail?

- Bulk mail (also known as Standard Mail) can save money on very large mailings (at least 200 pieces). Obtaining a bulk mail permit is a lengthy and somewhat cumbersome process for a small group, so bulk mail is not for everyone. To do a bulk mailing you must:
- Be a non-profit organization incorporated with your state and on file at the IRS;
- Obtain a bulk mail permit. There is an annual fee of \$185 for the permit if you want to use an indicia or imprint, which you must pay up-front. If you use a meter or special pre-cancelled stamps, there is no cost.
- Sort your mail. Class A mail must be pre-sorted by zip code—at least the first three digits.

What Are the Rates?

First-Class rates for letters are 44 cents per piece, 6 x 4 postcards are 28 cents per piece. The rate for an automated letter sent via Non-Profit Standard Bulk Mail is \$0.110-\$0.169 per piece depending on the level of sortation. The rate for a non-automated letter sent via Non-Profit Standard Bulk Mail is \$0.155 to \$0.172 per piece depending on level of sortation.

**Please check with the United States Postal Service (www.usps.com) for detailed and updated information by as rates are subject to change.*

What about Mailhouses?

Mailhouses are places that specialize in sending out large amounts of mail for a fee. You can provide addresses for the mailhouse via e-mail in a spreadsheet. The mailhouse will take care of the actual mailing process. Service fees will include:

- Data processing of your mailing list
- Printing name, address and barcode; sorting and delivery to post office

Postage is charged in addition to mailhouse service fees.

It is calculated according to the applicable rate per piece.

Prices vary from mailhouse to mailhouse, so please call for price quotes.

Keeping Members Active

Attending an event or a meeting does not guarantee that someone will be drawn into the group. Keeping potential members active is very difficult, especially during the slow seasons.

Talk to People Personally

- Speak personally to the members of your group and others in the community about their interests and hopes for the park.
- Not only will the personal connection make them more likely to stay involved, but you will be better able to pull them into projects that match their interests.

Publish a Newsletter

- A newsletter is a good way to remind people of your presence.
- The more people on your database who receive news of your events, the more people there will be out there who will be thinking about you.
- If you don't have the time to publish your own newsletter write an article about your group and ask a neighboring group to publish it in theirs.

Attend Other Organizations' Meetings

- By attending other group's meetings, not only can you share good ideas, but you can also invite new people to be a part of what your group is doing.

Mark the Date

- It is a good idea to set the date of your next meeting at the end of the previous one. That way, people know about the meeting with lots of time to spare.
- Alternatively, your group might decide to hold meetings at the same time every month. For example, decide that your group will meet the first Sunday of every month at 4pm, thus avoiding the question of when the next meeting will be.

Make Your Events Fun

- Adding a social aspect to your events, making them about more than weeding or clean-ups helps bring more people into the group.
- Remember that the group is about community-building as much as about taking care of the park.

Stage a Few Small Events

- Just because you're planning for a very big event, doesn't mean you can't hold some small ones in the meanwhile.
- Some event planning may take months and months. You can use this time to generate activity by planning some easy events with your active members.

Remember to Stay in Touch

- Even if you put up flyers and make announcements, usually the best way to get people to commit to coming to an event is to call them and get a verbal acknowledgment.
- Your group can set up a phone tree so that one person isn't stuck making all the calls. This also helps to keep people involved.
- Email is a cheap and easy way to keep the members of your group involved and connected.
- Regular updates to a distribution list keep people informed, and it's easy to add new names to the list.

Publishing a Newsletter

Once your group has compiled a mailing list, your next step may be to send regular mailings to your members and other interested individuals, alerting them to your group's plans and activities. A newsletter is a great way to send out all the information you want to distribute at one time.

Newsletters take many forms, from a simple photocopied sheet to a sophisticated five-page glossy booklet. The scope of your newsletter depends on the time and money you are willing (or able) to spend, but any style you choose will ultimately benefit your park by raising neighborhood interest.

Why Publish?

A newsletter gives your group—and your park—presence in people's minds. A printed newsletter describing your activities says "We exist!" to community members, politicians, and potential donors. There are many reasons to put out a newsletter:

- to find new members
- to publicize activities
- to reach a wider audience
- to create ties to local businesses
- to gain neighborhood recognition for your group

What's in a Name?

Before you start writing, come up with a catchy title for your newsletter that reflects your group's focus and concerns. For example, the newsletter of the Dog Run Committee of the Carl Schurz Park Association is titled, "The Scoop."

Ideas for Items

- **What's New**—Stories about park activities, gardening, neighborhood news, and more local happenings
- **Save the Date**—Promote your next meeting or clean-up by announcing the dates
- **Membership/Donation Information**—Let people know how they can become members and that you need donations to improve the park.
- **Masthead**—A list of your group's officers and a phone number or address where you can be reached
- **Important Numbers**—A list of hotline numbers, such as your park supervisor, or the local police
- **Advice Column**—Have a group member who knows about gardening or dogs, for example, give advice about their area of expertise.
- **History**—A history of your park
- **Kids' Corner**—Think up games or science information for kids or allow them their own page.

Delegate, Delegate

A newsletter should be a group effort; be sure more than one person is working on the project. Writing, copying, and mailing on a regular basis is a lot of work. Some time-saving tips:

- Set up a newsletter committee; have each member choose the job he or she wants to do.
- Invite guest columnists to write about issues of particular interest.
- Excerpt parks-related articles from your local paper—with their permission, of course.

Paying for It All

- To defray costs, try approaching local business and asking them to sponsor your newsletter.
- In exchange, offer to print a thank you and/or an advertisement. Businesses are often happy to support community newsletters, especially if they get something in return.

Expand Your Reach

Newsletters are a great way to reach more of your neighbors and let them know what you're doing in the park—but only if lots of people read them!

- Print extra copies of your newsletter and leave stacks in local cafes, bars, or bodegas.
- Post them on neighborhood bulletin boards.

- Most important: **always** include a phone number or address so that new people can reach you if they want to get involved.

Creating a Brochure

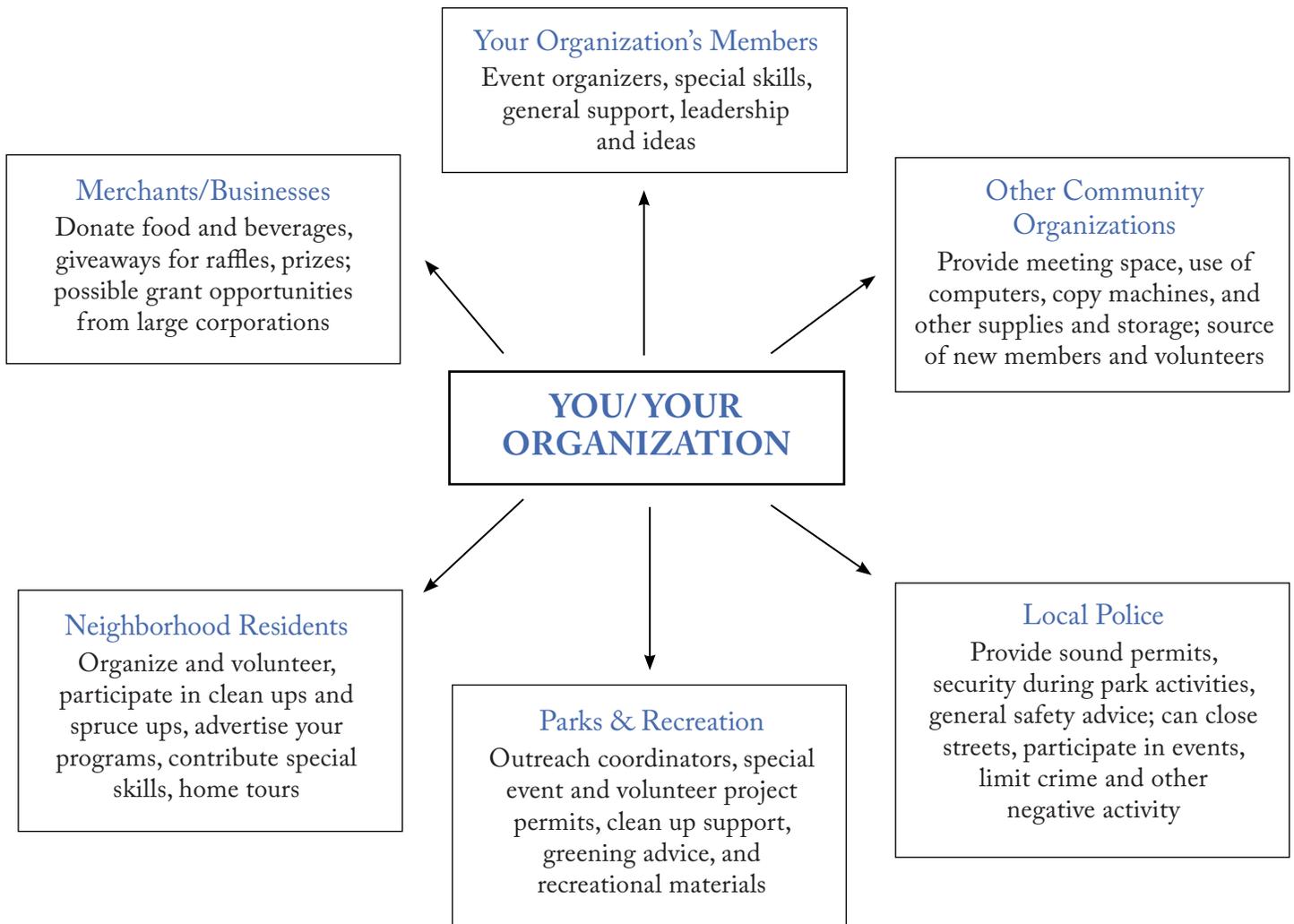
A brochure can be a great way to advertise your park and expand your volunteer base. By showcasing the history of your park, its natural features, and its recreational opportunities, you can educate people in your community about how valuable your park is, and encourage them to volunteer. A brochure is also a great way to showcase your group and its activities. Published material can be excellent attachments to grant applications, and useful for showing your group's commitment when meeting with government officials.

Brochure Components:

1. Choose your target audience and distribution methods.
 - This step is important because it will determine the style, content, and scope of the brochure.
 - Are you trying to educate the general public about your park? Reach out to people who have come to your events? Bring more children or elderly into the park? Are you interested in covering the park's history, its natural features, its facilities?
 - When you decide all this you'll be better able to make decisions about the size, shape, and layout of the brochure, whether you need photos or drawings, several colors, etc., and how many copies you want to print. This will all be very important information for Step 2:
2. Find a printer.
 - Depending on the scope of your project, you may be able to photocopy your brochure on nice paper and never have to deal with printers.
 - If you want to include photographs or multiple colors, a printer is your best bet.
3. Design the brochure.
 - If someone in your group has a knack for design and layout, they will be your best resource on this step.
 - Look at other brochures for ideas on what makes a good brochure.
4. Write the text.
 - Catchy graphics, simple text, and bold headings all help to make a brochure easier to read and engaging to look at. Some basics to consider in design are:
 - Type of paper—heavy stock, regular white, flecked, etc.
 - Size of paper
 - Number of folds—two, three, or four
 - If no one in your group is or knows a designer, you may want to hire one. The designer ultimately oversees the whole production process, deals with the printer, so it is important that someone take over that role.
 - Hired designers bill by the hour, anywhere between \$25 to \$100 per hour; often a community group can receive a discount. A simple brochure will take between 10 and 20 hours of a designer's time.
 - The amount of text in the brochure will depend on the design you have chosen, and the style will depend on the target audience you are trying to reach.
 - If a member of your group has strong writing skills, they can be your writer. Some components of the text might be:
 - A history of the park
 - A description of the park's natural features
 - A description of the park's recreational opportunities—playgrounds, pool, etc.
 - The goals of your group for improving the park
 - A call to action—encouraging volunteers to get involved
5. Choose and obtain images.
 - A brochure is much more reader-friendly when text is interspersed with images.
 - These can be photographs, drawings, or maps of the park. Some tips for getting images:
 - You can take photographs and scan them into a computer for printing, or use a digital camera.

- If someone in your group is an artist, or knows an artist, you can include drawings of your park, such as an interesting or well-known architectural feature.
 - Maps can be a great addition to a brochure, especially if your park is large. However, unless you can find a pre-existing map of your park, or a professional mapmaker who is willing to make a map for free, they can also be expensive—between \$300 and \$3000, depending on the intricacy and number of features. Another option is to find out if your Parks & Recreation Department has map archives of their parks.
6. Decide if you want to include a reply mailer.
- If the brochure is intended for outreach purposes, you may want to include a postcard that people can punch out and return to your group if they want to get involved.
 - If you want the card to be postage-paid, you need to be a registered non-profit and apply for a bulk mailing permit from the post office—or affix stamps yourselves.
 - **Even if you don't include a reply mailer in your brochure, be sure to print your group's phone number!** That way interested volunteers can contact you if they want to get involved.
7. Proofread, proofread, proofread!
- After you send the brochure to the printer, any mistakes that the writer made will be very costly to correct. *Have at least* three pairs of eyes look at the brochure text to be sure there are no errors.
8. Print the brochure.
- You can photocopy the brochure on nice-quality, heavy paper and spend very little money.
 - If you are using a professional printer—which we advise if you want to use color—printing can be a fairly complicated process; you should allow at least two weeks between when you finish the design, content, and layout of the brochure and when you get the final printed copies.
- There are a number of steps involved in printing:
 - **Preparation.** The printer needs to be given a mock-up of the brochure, with text, images, maps, etc. all laid out the way you want them to be in the final version. He or she also needs a memo listing the specs of the brochure (size, paper type, number of folds, number of copies, number of colors, etc.), and an electronic copy containing:
 1. the brochure in whichever software program you and the printer agree upon;
 2. the map file (if there is one);
 3. the fonts to be used in the printing (copy from the Fonts folder on your computer);
 4. image files if the images are from a digital camera, or the original images if they need to be scanned (let the printer do the scanning, they have much better scanners)
 - **Receive Proofs.** Request a blueline of the brochure as well as a color match print (if you are using more than one color).
 - **Review Proofs.** After the printer has given you a proof of the brochure, look *carefully* for misaligned text, improperly placed or sized images, or any other mistakes the printer might have made. Once any changes have been made, sign off on the proofs.
 - **Be on Press.** If possible, arrange to be present while the brochure is being printed. Then you can help the printer adjust the colors.
 - **Arrange for Delivery.** Your brochure is ready!

Resources in Your Community



Part IV: Event Planning Toolbox

A. WHY EVENTS ARE IMPORTANT

1. They're Good for the Park

- “If you don’t use it, you lose it.”
 - A buzz of sustained, positive activity is key to a safe and vibrant park.
 - There’s no substitute for a steady stream of events that brings in the good and drives out the bad, particularly if you are trying to “take back” a park.
 - Events in a natural area, such as bird watching or a hike, can help introduce people to the park as a community resource
 - Don’t forget to host events in the early evening (stargazing, music, sports), when the park is most often underused (or abused).

Good times in the park mean good feelings toward it. When people have a good time in the park because you’ve drawn them in with a good event, they’ll feel better about the park and be more likely to respect it and support it in the future.

2. They're Good for Your Group

- **They can help increase your membership.** Events bring new people into the park. Take advantage of this by having a table at *every* event where people can sign up for your mailing list and find out how to get involved or become a member.
- **They can be used to leverage resources.** A successful track record putting on events can demonstrate to potential supporters that your group can make a difference in the park. This helps when seeking funds from everyone from elected officials to corporations and businesses.
- **They raise your group’s profile.** A successful, well-run event adds to your reputation, which will help you get more support and attendance at future events.

B. KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

Tap into Other Groups

- Encourage everyone—Scout troops, schools, athletic leagues, day camps, block and tenant associations—to participate in relevant events.
- Better yet, get them to co-sponsor the event.
- Your group will benefit from another set of connections, multiply your resources, and (ideally) lighten your workload.

Don't Bite Off More than You Can Chew

- The size and scale of events should be decided by the number of people willing to help organize them.
- Do something simple first, then build from there.
- Don’t be afraid to scale back if you find you’ve been too ambitious; better to have a few strong successes.

Plan Ahead

- Allow two weeks of planning for regular clean-ups, at least a month for small events, and several months for large events.

Publicize, Publicize, Publicize

- Notify your mailing list.
- Put flyers up everywhere: shop windows, bulletin boards, in churches, schools, and apartment buildings.
- List your events in the community calendars of local papers, local access cable, and radio stations.
- Most important, get your friends to tell three friends who tell three friends (and so on). Nothing works like word of mouth and networking.

Expect the Unexpected

A first-time event will take twice as much effort to plan as you think it’s going to, and will go over budget by about 20%. There will be bureaucratic hurdles you never expected, egos that need to be soothed, last-minute emergencies, and unseasonable blizzards. Don’t worry. Be happy.

Delegate Responsibilities and Develop Expertise

- Have one person in your group deal with the Parks Department, another with publicity, a third with fundraising or membership.
- Having one person consistently responsible for something lets him or her build specific skills and useful relationships.

Say Thank You

- People will be happy to help you next time if you sincerely, publicly, and frequently thank them this time. When in doubt give people *more* credit than they deserve.

Build on Your Successes

- Repeat annual events. It's easier the next time; people know to expect it; and you begin to build traditions that lead to larger participation each year.

- Try to do at least one event each season to maintain your profile and presence in the park.

C. EVENT IDEAS

Having trouble thinking of events to host? The following events have all been held successfully by community park groups around the country.

Keep your park, your community, and the ability of your group in mind when planning events. Not all events are appropriate in all parks—ecologically sensitive parks should be treated differently than a concrete baseball diamond.

Events Scheduled on Specific Dates

Event	Date	Activities
Earth Day	April 22	Trail restoration, invasive species removal, bird watching tours, information and petition tables set up by environmental groups. More information can be found at www.earthday.net
Arbor Day	Last Friday in April	Tree plantings More information can be found at www.arborday.org
Memorial Day	Last Monday in May	Spruce up a war memorial or a park named for a veteran
National Trails Day	1st Saturday in June	Trail clearing & maintenance, hiking More information can be found at www.americanhiking.org/NTD.aspx
Parks and Recreation Month	Throughout the month of July	National Recreation and Park Association sponsored event to include park clean-ups, meeting with elected officials to promote the value of local parks and recreation, etc. More information can be found at www.nrpa.org .
National Night Out, America's Night Out Against Crime	1st Tuesday in August	March/rally to take back the park and surrounding streets More information can be found at www.nationaltownwatch.org/nno/about.html
National Public Lands Day	September	National Public Lands Day is the nation's largest hands-on volunteer effort to improve and enhance the public lands Americans enjoy. More information can be found at www.publiclandsday.org
National Park(ing) Day	Each year in September	National Park(ing) Day is a celebration of parks and open space sponsored by the Trust for Public Land. Participants reclaim parking spaces that are used for vehicles throughout the year, as community parks. More information can be found at www.parkingday.org
World Parks Day	Saturday of the Fall Equinox, September	Communicate the critical importance of parks in a global context, encourage people to enjoy their local park and appreciate the importance of green space More information can be found at www.worldparksday.com

Events You Can Schedule Throughout the Season

Event	Activities
Regular Clean-ups and Plantings	Hold these monthly, weekly—however often your group can manage. You'll raise your profile and achieve results
Concerts	Rock and roll, classical, jazz, salsa, country line dancing, swing—whatever will appeal to your park's neighbors
Theatrical Performances	Plays, puppet shows, storytelling, poetry reading, film series
Sports Tournaments	Bocce, basketball, softball, cricket, handball, roller hockey, martial arts, chess
Family Day/Carnival	Children's activities, games, performances, food, pony rides, cotton candy, clowns, face painting, rented jumping castle
Multi-cultural Festival	Traditional arts and crafts, music, storytelling, food, games, sports
Waterfront/River/Lake festival	Boating, catch-and-release fishing, environmental education, musical performances, art contests
Environmental Education Activities	Ecological walking tours, tree & plant identification, water & soil quality testing, bird population censuses
Dog Run Events	Health and grooming information, dress-up-your dog contest, owner look-a-like contest, obedience training/competition, frisbee
Health Fair	Free screenings for high blood pressure from a local hospital or clinic, fitness advice, and training from a coach
Safety/Police Fair	Presentations about safety in the park, at home, and around the neighborhood, tours of police and emergency vehicles
Volunteer/Donor Thank You Party	Speeches, certificates of appreciation, gifts, food
Food-centered Event	Picnic, ice cream social, shad bake, cook-off, cakewalk
Historical Delebration	Celebrate your park's birthday or the people or events commemorated by your park's name or a monument in the park; historical re-enactments
Walk-a-thon/Road Race/Bike-a-thon	Raise awareness and funds

Delegating Responsibility

The larger an event, the harder it is for just one person to run. An event-planning committee helps ensure different tasks are assigned to different people. This allows individuals to develop expertise and contacts in particular fields.

The following is a suggested breakdown of tasks for delegation. Though **no event will require all these tasks** (some tasks are for volunteer events, some for entertainment events), it helps to think of the different categories of tasks entailed in an event.

Event Planning

Clean-up/Trail Restoration

- Working with your parks department to survey the park ahead of time
- Identifying what work needs to be done
- Determining how many volunteers are needed
- Acquiring supplies
- Scheduling the day's activities

Performance/Fair

- Choosing the kinds of activities
- Contracting with performers
- Getting donations
- Arranging logistics

Pre-Event Publicity

- Customizing posters and flyers
- Posting flyers around the community
- Making announcements at community meetings
- Answering requests for more information

Media Coverage (both before and after the event)

- Writing press releases & faxing them to newspapers
- Making follow-up calls
- Answering reporters' questions

Volunteer Recruitment

- Calling through the membership list to recruit people to help out at the event
- Seeking volunteers from other partner groups

Networking

- Keeping important contacts (funders, partners) in the loop

- Acting as a liaison to elected officials, community boards, and other community groups

Event Planning Timetable

Specific events require particular steps, such as contracting musicians or buying arts and crafts supplies. This is a general guideline to help you map out the basic steps entailed in putting on a general event.

At Least Six Months in Advance

- If the event requires your group to raise funds, identify sources of support and reach out to them.
- Grants programs & corporate sponsorships often have a long turnaround time and you don't want to be caught without support for the event.

At Least Two Months in Advance

- Form an organizing committee and delegate tasks—publicity, fundraising, volunteer recruitment.
- Choose a date for the event.
- Work with the parks department to finalize a date and apply for a permit (in many places, this **must** be done at least 30 days in advance).
- Alert your elected officials if you'd like them to attend.
- Contact any professional artists and performers; their schedules will book up quickly for summer weekends.
- Partner with other community groups to co-sponsor the event.
- Talk to your Park Board or Commission for support.

At Least One Month In Advance

- Solicit in-kind donations from local businesses.
- Recruit volunteers to work at the event.
- For large events, start advertising with posters at local businesses and other community hubs; attend meetings of other community groups to make announcements.
- Contact local newspapers to list the event in their calendars (check deadlines carefully; different papers have different rules).
- Send official invitations to elected officials, community leaders, civic groups, etc.

Two Weeks in Advance

Publicize the event by hanging flyers in the neighborhood, through email, and by word of mouth.

- Confirm everything—performers, sound system, food, volunteers.
- Send a press advisory to local papers announcing the event.
- Remind VIPs by phone.
- Be in close contact with the Parks Department, police, and any other partner agencies.

On the Day of the Event

- Meet with all your volunteers before the event for a short orientation. Make sure everyone knows what they're doing and where they should be.
- When assigning tasks to volunteers, assign clean up as well so that people don't just disappear and leave you alone at the end of the day. If the park is left a mess, you may be asked to pay clean-up costs, even if this fee was waived in advance.
- If there are safety issues, make sure all of your volunteers are aware of them. For example, during a clean-up no one should ever touch a needle. If kids will be participating, make sure someone will be keeping track of them at all times.
- Set up a table with information about the group, a sign-in sheet, and a collections jar—never miss a chance to recruit new members. Have an outgoing, chatty volunteer sit at the table.
- Make sure someone from the event committee is always present to answer questions and deal with emergencies
- If you give out tools or anything else you need back, put a volunteer in charge of keeping track of them and getting them back.

Follow-up

- Thank everyone—volunteers, donors, the employees who helped. If you show your appreciation you'll get more help next time.
- Meet with the organizing committee to debrief and assess the event—try to figure out how you can improve next time.

Publicizing Your Event

Publicity helps you attract new volunteers and raises your profile as a group. There are a number of approaches you can take to publicize your group and events in the park.

1. Flyers

After word-of-mouth, one of the most effective ways to publicize an event is to post flyers all over your neighborhood. You don't need to be an artist or a desktop publishing expert to make great flyers.

What to Do:

- Make flyers on a computer or by hand
- Remember to include a date, time, and specific location
- Provide a contact number so that people can call to get more information or volunteer to help out
- Make copies—try to use connections to get free copies
- How many copies you make depends on how many people you want at the event—50 is plenty for a small story-reading event in a playground, while you might need 500 for a large festival.
- Consider making larger (8.5 in. x 11 in. or larger) flyers for posting, smaller ones (5.5 in. x 8.5 in.) to display in stacks.

Good Places to Distribute Flyers

Post flyers:

- In the park, especially at the entrances and other high-use spots
- In the windows of local stores, especially those near the park (ask for permission)
- On community bulletin boards in supermarkets, communities of faith, building lobbies, gyms, the YMCA, and recreation centers
- In elementary schools, high schools, and colleges
- At bus stops, theaters, and other high-traffic spots

Ask to display a stack of flyers:

- inside local stores and restaurants
- in the display areas of libraries and recreation centers

2. Media Coverage

Local media—newspapers, local access cable, radio—can help your group in two ways:

- **Free Advertising.** By including your event in their calendar sections prior to the event, they can help you reach a wider audience.

- **Good Publicity.** By writing longer articles about the event after the fact, they can help enhance the image of your group.

Be sure to clip and save any press coverage. The articles make great back-up for requests for funds or other support. *(For information about writing press releases and getting coverage in the media, see p. 33)*

Spreading the Word: Getting Help from Your Community

There's often no need to reinvent the wheel in publicizing your projects in the park. Other, well-established groups in your community probably have effective ways of communicating with your neighbors. Since they share with you the goal of improving the quality of life in your neighborhood, they will often be happy to help you publicize events.

Civic and Religious Groups

Ask the presidents of these groups for help publicizing your event. Particularly if you offer to do the same for them, they may be willing to let you:

- Make an announcement at the beginning of one of the group's meetings.
- Hand out flyers at a meeting or send them to the group's mailing list.
- Post flyers on the group's bulletin board.
- List your event in the group's newsletter.

Local Schools

Schools can be a great resource for event publicity—after all, when children come to an event, their parents usually come with them! Ask the principals and administrators of elementary schools, high schools, and colleges for help publicizing your event to students. They may:

- Put you in touch with interested teachers or the PTA.
- Help you distribute flyers to students and parents.
- Let you post flyers on the school's bulletin board.
- Put you in touch with student groups that may be interested in helping you, such as the student government or an environmental club. (Approach these student groups as you would other civic groups, by asking to make an announcement at one of their meetings.)

Elected Officials

Elected officials and their staff can help you publicize an event by:

- Including your flyers in one of their regular mailings.
- Announcing your event at the many community meetings they attend.

Working with Parks and Recreation to Plan an Event

Any event that takes place in a public park requires permission and cooperation with the local Park and Recreation department. By being careful to take all the appropriate steps, you can help ensure that your event goes smoothly and with the support and goodwill of City and Park officials.

Communicate

- **Let all players know about the event at least one month in advance.** This will avoid scheduling conflicts and help ensure that you will have full permission for the event as well as all the services you need.
- Also inform the **police** and **park staff** who work in your park.

Get Permission

If you are organizing a special event, altering the park in any way, restricting access to the park or any part of it, collecting funds, or selling anything, you must get explicit permission, often in the form of a permit. Contact your local parks and recreation department on the steps you need to take for acquiring a permit and any additional follow-up steps you need to take.

Remember That It's Easier than It Sounds

This may sound complicated, but it's often easier than it sounds. Some things to reassure you:

- All the necessary paperwork can be done easily if you give yourself plenty of time by starting a month in advance.
- Things will go much more smoothly if you have good relationships with your Parks and Recreation Department.
- Fees can often be waived for non-profit community groups dedicated to helping the park.

Insurance for Park Events

One of the realities of planning events in parks is that there are always legal particulars. If your group is working with the Parks Department to do clean-ups or small picnics, it may not be necessary for your group to hold an insurance policy. However, if your group is planning to put on large events on a regular basis, it would be to your advantage to have a policy taken out in your group's name.

Insurance Basics

For any insurance policy, plan on completing a short survey. The insurance agent or broker will give you an estimate based on this survey. You should be prepared with a full schedule of your planned events, estimated attendance, the names of any performers, and other details about the event.

Be sure to find out what the rules are when vendors are present at events. When items are being sold, especially food, the rules about insurance vary. The insurance salesperson you deal with should solicit these details from you when you enroll.

Types of Coverage

One-Day Special Event Policy

- A basic liability plan that usually covers up to one million dollars in damages
- Only covers your group for one day.
- Cost varies based on the specific park, the number of people estimated to attend, and the type of event it will be.

One-Year Liability Plan

- Cost varies based on the size and number of events your group is planning to produce.
- Covers your group for a full year's schedule of events.
- Cost varies based on the specific park, the number of planned events, and so forth.

The ABCs of Do Re Me: A Guide to Planning and Staging a Concert in the Park

Your neighborhood park is a great place to hold concerts and other events—four seasons a year. Clear weather and twinkling night stars make for a perfect evening, and while you can't count on the weather, things are guaranteed to go

better if you have planned ahead and covered your bases. Events require planning, hard work and asking the right people the right questions. The following is a guide on how to go about planning and staging a concert in the park.

When planning any event in your park, it's always important to let key people know what you're doing, especially your Park and Recreation Department. They have experience in planning such events, and may be able to help you.

Why Hold a Concert in the Park?

- **Concerts help to improve the quality of life.** Successfully executed events, concerts in particular, make people feel good about their communities and their parks.
- **Concerts make your group look good.** Use the opportunity to recruit new members, solicit donations and inform the public about your mission.

Getting a Special Events Permit

- **In many localities, you must have a permit for your concert.** Every location has different rules relating to obtaining a permit. Start with the relationship you've formed with the Parks and Recreation Department and go from there.
- While applying for a special events permit, inquire about whether or not the Parks Department can help provide amplification.
- Often, a noise permit is also required.

Choosing Your Music

- **Multicultural Appeal**—People often feel more connected to an event if the music comes from their culture. Think about who lives in your neighborhood and consider inviting musicians with the same background.
- **Anything Goes**—There are very few concerts that nobody likes. And of course, the longer the event, the more bands you can have.

Finding Musicians

- **Network**—Ask your members and everyone you know for names of local bands looking for a place to play and some free publicity.
- **Use Local Resources**—Contact local radio stations, dance clubs, faith communities, community centers,

art councils, high schools and boys' and girls' clubs, any organizations that might have better connections to the local music scene.

Negotiating with Musicians

- **Price**—First look for musicians who are willing to work for free or who have their own sponsors. Local musicians in particular are in need of community exposure. Concerts in parks offer free publicity, thus many are willing to work at no cost. If you end up hiring a musician, payment is usually rendered after the performance.
- **Contracts**—Generally, extensive contracts aren't necessary for small events like these, but it's always good to have something in writing. Be sure to notify performers of your rain date so they won't expect to be paid if the event is canceled. Remember, local performers have as much to gain from these events as you do. It's unlikely they won't show up.

Part V: How to Make Your Park Safer

Sometimes friends groups form due to safety concerns at a park. Part five offers suggestions on how to mobilize your community if it's uncared for and dangerous safety concerns are an issue in your park. As you'll see, little things that make a park seem—graffiti, trash, broken glass, people drinking, misbehaving or playing very loud music—can be turned around with a strong park support group.

A. SAFETY ESSENTIALS

Beware of “Broken Windows”

- **Little problems lead to bigger ones.** The little things that make a park seem uncared for and dangerous—graffiti, trash, broken glass, people drinking, misbehaving or playing very loud music—create an atmosphere in which crime flourishes.
- Report vandalism and help to keep the park clean. Remember that “quality of life” rules are more important than they seem, and need to be enforced.

Bring People Back

- **Use good activities to drive out bad activities.** If people are too scared to come into the park on their own, organize festivals, events, picnics, tournaments, spruce-ups—whatever it takes—to bring them back.
- One activity alone won't do it. But if you work steadily, week in and week out, to create a critical mass of positive activities in the park, you *will* reach the “tipping point” and the park *will* come back.

Crowd Out Crime

- A successful, vital park repels the criminal element, which thrives in darkness and anonymity. Anything you can do to bring people into the park is a step towards making your park safer.
- Events of all sizes, from clean-ups to international festivals, serve dual purposes: they drive out those who are misusing your park and convince the community that the park is a place for fun, not danger.

Discourage Negative Activities

- **Make problem users feel unwanted.** One parks group hung a banner in their park that said, “Drug Dealers

Keep Out!” Another group “staked out” their park by eating their breakfast at a visible spot every morning. That same group would politely, non-threateningly, clean up the trash around the feet of pot-smoking teenagers that had become a problem.

- **Don't let problems fester.** Contact your local park supervisor or manager as soon as you see trash, broken glass, or graffiti. However, you don't have to wait to do something—sometimes you can address a problem yourself faster than the parks department can.

Be Patient—Reaching the “Tipping Point” Takes Time

- It can take time and lots of hard work before a park that has been abandoned reaches the point where it shifts from being frightening and dangerous to safe and full of life.
- At some point, there will be a critical mass of positive activity, and the “feel” of the park will shift. Don't give up if it doesn't happen right away.

Do Not Put Yourself in Danger

- Drug dealers and other criminals who inhabit your park can be dangerous.
- Do not unnecessarily risk your safety by confronting them directly. There are many other effective strategies for making your park safer.

Don't Go It Alone

- Your local police are your most important resource for fighting crime, but developing relationships with them takes time and work. Get to know the police that patrol your neighborhood, the local commander, and any other key staff that your group identifies. Find out if your local police have community meetings, and let them know about the issues that matter to you.
- **Be the “eyes and ears” of the police.** The police can't be in your park all the time. You can help by reporting any problems you see. The more you report problems, the more likely the police are to help you, as their distribution of resources is determined by the number of complaints they receive.
- **Be specific about the problems.** Look for patterns and report them. Is there a particular time when kids are hanging out, when people are selling or using drugs? Are there “regulars” who make trouble? More details make it easier for police to focus on the problem people, times and places.

- **Get on the agenda.** If your local police have community meetings that are open to the public, attend them and bring others with you. There's no better way for the police to know about the issues that matter to you. Also attend meetings of the parks board/commission, and of local block, tenants, and merchants associations. Don't forget elected officials, too.
- **Think about organizing a safety committee/patrol.** When done properly, having a group focused on safety issues and/or a patrol can be a good supplement to the work of the police. But it must be done carefully, and in full consultation with them, if it is to be successful and appropriate.

B. SMALL ACTIONS THAT MAKE A BIG IMPACT

Negative users move into parks that nobody else cares about. Therefore, the most important thing you can do is send a message that you do care. Small actions can turn your park into a place that is no longer inviting to negative elements.

1. Clean Up

- Parks workers should and will clean your park regularly, but they can't be there all the time. Any help you can give can make a tremendous difference.
- Broken glass, litter, weeds—all these things are signs that your park has been abandoned. Make it clear to everybody that the community has come back to the park by cleaning it up.

2. Paint over Graffiti

- The best way to discourage graffiti artists is by removing graffiti as fast as it goes up.
- Whenever you see graffiti, report it to your park's supervisor or manager.

3. Address Vandalized Equipment

- Just like litter and graffiti, broken equipment sends a negative message about your park.
- If you know who the vandals are and when they normally act, report all the information to your local police.
- Talk to your park's supervisor and manager to get vandalized equipment repaired.

4. Increase Lighting

- Your park will feel safer after dark and be less inviting to negative users if it is well lit.
- If you have lights that aren't working, report the problem, and the length of time the light has been out.
- If you would like more lighting in your park, discuss it with your Park Supervisor or Manager.

5. Remove Undergrowth

- Crimes—especially drinking, drug dealing, and prostitution—most often happen out of public view, sometimes under cover of overgrown plants.
- If the undergrowth in your park is out of control, ask your park's supervisor to remove it.

6. Post Park Rules

- If the rules of the park are clearly marked, most people will follow them. It's a lot easier to ask someone to stop doing something if you can point to an official sign that prohibits their action.
- Discuss the quality-of-life issues of greatest concern with your manager (dogs off-leash, barbecuing, littering) to identify the most appropriate signage.

7. Tell People Whom to Call About a Problem

- Create a leaflet listing the action numbers that people should call when they notice a problem: your police community affairs office, park supervisor, and elected officials.
- Distribute the leaflet far and wide. One group created a civilian observation patrol and gave leaflets to everyone their patrol met in the park—over 1,000 in total.

C. WORKING WITH THE POLICE

Understand the Structure of Your Local Police

- Policing in the United States is conducted by numerous types of agencies at many different levels.
- Finding out how your local police are structured is the first step in partnering with them.

Make Friends

- The best way to build these relationships is to attend community meetings at your local station, precinct or department.

Understand the Limitations of Local Police

- Local police have limited resources. They cannot assign an officer to stand in your playground 24 hours a day and they must respond to emergencies before they respond to nuisances. Nevertheless, the police exist to make your neighborhood safe, and the more closely your group works with them, the more positive the outcome will be.
- The police must have just cause in order to arrest someone—usually that means they must see him or her committing a crime. For minor crimes, like loitering or littering, it is much more common for the police to issue warnings and fines than to make arrests.

Call Repeatedly

- The police allocate more resources to the areas that receive the highest number of formal complaints.
- If you call about a nuisance once, you may not get much response, but if you call about it repeatedly, the chances of action increase. For best results, have your neighbors and group members call too.
- Be polite—remember that you are trying to build relationships.

Take Notes

- Every time you call the police, make a record of your call. Write down the date and time, the name of the person you spoke to, the number assigned to your complaint, and the details of the complaint.
- Make a record of any follow-up. These notes will be essential if you ever need to request more resources or complain about an insufficient response.

D. ORGANIZING IN DANGEROUS SITUATIONS

Drug dealers and some of the other criminals in your park are dangerous people. **Do not put yourself in danger by confronting criminals directly.** There are many things that you can do without exposing yourself to unnecessary risk.

1. Remain Anonymous

- Do not endanger yourself; all 911 calls can be anonymous.
- When you observe illegal activity, report your observations to the authorities.

2. Call from a Secure Place

- If you observe dangerous activity in the park, don't call while you are in the park and make yourself a target.
- Go somewhere safe—like your own home or a nearby store—to make the call.

3. Don't Go It Alone

- If you must enter what you feel is a dangerous situation, remember that there is safety in numbers. Do not go alone. The larger the group, the better. With enough people, you can be intimidating, too.
- Don't be a giraffe, sticking your neck out. Put together a committee and work with other civic groups in your community. If everyone in the community is organizing against crime, you are all safer.

4. Work with the Police

- The **best** way to ensure your safety is to work with the police to get the dangerous criminals out of your park.
- By building a relationship with local police and communicating the problems you are facing in your park, you will more easily persuade them to send more patrols through your park.

E. VIGILANCE

As the park's users and neighbors, you and the members of your group are the best "eyes and ears" of the public, acting and advocating for safety. It is important to remember, though, that there are safe ways to address crime and dangerous ways. Follow these tips to stay safe:

1. Observe and Report

- Whenever any of you are in the park, keep your eyes open and record and report what you see.
- Remember, however, that the people who misuse your park are often dangerous. **Do not put yourself in danger** by confronting the perpetrators of whatever crime you see.

2. Be Specific and Accurate

- Provide the police with as much information as possible: clear descriptions of the situation, the people involved, times, dates, car descriptions and license plate numbers. Unless they have this information, the police won't be able to conduct a proper investigation or make arrests.
- Time is especially important, as the police can't provide 24-hour surveillance. If you can narrow the time frame, and let them know exactly when the illegal activity tends to take place, then the police can make sure to patrol the park at these times.

3. When You See a Problem, Report It Immediately

- As soon as you see something wrong, report it. Some groups have attached small cards with police and other hotline numbers to pay phones near the park so that any visitor can report a crime.
- If the police don't come immediately, keep calling. Eventually, they will come, and the more calls you make, the more resources they will send.

4. Give Information to the Proper Authorities

- Report your observations to the police when you know who, what, why, where and when something illegal is happening, or when you feel threatened, alert the police.
- If you notice something that needs to get fixed, call your Parks Department if you are on Park property.
- If you catch someone in the act of vandalism or painting graffiti, call the police. Broken sidewalks, broken windows, open fire hydrants should be reported.

F. CIVILIAN OBSERVATION PATROLS

A proactive way to attack the crime problem in your park and neighborhood is by forming citizen observation patrols. People who walk problem areas regularly are more apt to notice patterns in and details of illegal activity which they can report to the police. **Remember, these patrols are for observation only—DO NOT attempt to interrupt crimes in progress.**

Do Not Put Yourself in Danger

- Always let the police know when you go on patrol.
- Some groups have used these patrols to send a message. Putting on uniforms, they have marched around the neighborhood letting the drug dealers and other criminals know that they weren't going to take any more. While it can be effective, this kind of confrontational activity is dangerous and is not necessary for a civilian patrol to be a success.
- A low-key patrol that simply collects information and passes it on to the police and other authorities can also be effective, with much less risk.
- You may want to present a united front by wearing matching t-shirts or hats, though you should first assess your situation and decide whether this may put you at risk by making you a target.
- For safety's sake, you may want to communicate by radio.

Start Small

- For a covert observation patrol, a huge group isn't necessary to make an impact. Start with a small group of committed individuals.
- You don't want to let the dealers know that you are reporting to the police on their activities. Small groups are important for confidentiality.

Communicate with the Police

- Let your local police know that you want to start a citizen's patrol.
- Discuss with them the times and routes you will be walking. Coordinate your patrols with the regular police patrols.
- Police Departments may also run training programs for civilian patrols.

G. NATIONAL NIGHT OUT: AMERICA'S NIGHT OUT AGAINST CRIME

What Is “National Night Out?”

Each year, in early August, communities across the country gather together to celebrate the relationship between the community and the police and to send a message to criminals that the community is united against them.

What Happens?

Police plan their own events. Activities often include:

- candlelight vigils
- anti-crime rallies
- cookouts
- block parties in front of the police station
- youth programs
- lectures and information sessions from various local, state, and national law enforcement agencies (from the bomb squad to the FBI) on how they work.

How to Get Involved

Most National Night Out events are organized by local police. If your local police have public meetings, attend them and express your interest. Talk to your community affairs officer or appropriate staff and let them know that you want next year's celebration to take place in your park.

Similar Events You Can Hold Throughout the Season

- The goal of National Night Out is to support and galvanize community and police partnership against crime and to show criminals that they are not welcome in your area.
- If you don't want to wait until next August to host such an event, remember that you can organize a safety/police fair for any time during the season.



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